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**MAINTAINING THE COVENANT IDEA: THE
PRESERVATION OF FEDERAL THEOLOGY'S
CORPORATE DIMENSIONS AMONG SCOTLAND'S
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY EVANGELICAL
PRESBYTERIANS**

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THESIS ABSTRACT

MAINTAINING THE COVENANT IDEA: THE PRESERVATION OF FEDERAL THEOLOGY'S CORPORATE DIMENSIONS AMONG SCOTLAND'S EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIANS

This thesis explores how Scotland's federal theology helped to perpetuate the seventeenth-century Presbyterian conception of a covenanted Church and nation among a significant portion of eighteenth-century evangelical Presbyterians. It examines how both a seventeenth-century form of federal theology and a social ethic based on Scotland's Covenants were preserved among many Scottish Presbyterians between 1690 and the 1790s, until a broader and more individualistic evangelicalism increasingly eclipsed the corporate aspects of federal theology. The thesis focuses on the experiences of the Secession and Reformed Presbyterian Churches, Presbyterian denominations which broke away from the established Church of Scotland.

Chapter one traces the origins of federal theology in Scotland, and considers the Scottish covenant idea within Post-Reformation Calvinism generally, and more particularly within the Presbyterian Church of Scotland after the Revolution Settlement of 1689-90. Chapter two considers how federal theology was preserved and perpetuated among Presbyterian evangelicals after 1690, how these evangelicals continued the covenanting practice of identifying Scotland with biblical Israel, and how their longings for national revival came to hinge upon the renewal of Covenant obligations. Chapter three considers the impact of the *Marrow* controversy in prolonging the predominant influence of federal theology on eighteenth-century Scottish popular piety, particularly among the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians. Chapter four considers a further aspect of the *Marrow* controversy—that is, its emphasis on the connection between the moral law and the covenant of grace. In analyzing both the individual and corporate dimensions of federal theology, this chapter examines the thought that informed the practice of covenanting, and considers why many Secession and Reformed Presbyterians believed in the 'perpetual obligation' of Scotland's Covenants for subsequent generations. The chapter also introduces the theological criticisms that would in the course of the eighteenth-century largely undermine federal theology's corporate applications for most Presbyterians and that would greatly weaken adherence to the Covenants within the two Secession Synods (Burgher and Antiburgher). Chapter five examines the application of the covenant idea to the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. It explores how the sacraments kept alive the social ideal of federal theology and its aspirations for national revival within the Secession and Reformed Presbyterian Churches between 1690 and the 1820s, despite the mounting theological criticisms of federal theology and covenanting. Finally, chapter six examines how federal theology's corporate aspects affected the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians' views on Church and State and the role of the civil magistrate. Consideration is given to how Scotland's changing social, political, and intellectual contexts eroded the commitments to a Covenant piety among evangelical Presbyterians, and to how this led to further schisms within the two Secession Synods at the close of the eighteenth century.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

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Any shortcomings in this thesis that remain are, of course, all my own.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of 'covenant' holds a central position in Scotland's ecclesiastical history and theological development.¹ As a system of thought, 'covenant theology', or 'federal' Calvinism as it is often known, provided Scotland with a potent formula for a Christian interpretation of history that portrayed God's relationship with individual, Church and nation in a dynamic way. Perhaps more than any other Protestant European nation, Scotland was informed by covenant theology.² From the sixteenth century, a covenant paradigm emerged as the overarching structure for individual, ecclesiastical and national piety in Scotland. Church and State were dominated by the vision of a godly commonwealth. Seventeenth-century Scotland witnessed the development and implementation of a mature federal theology through influential figures such as Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), Alexander Henderson (1583-1646), David Dickson (1583-1663) and George Gillespie (1613-1649), and particularly through the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646) and *The Sum of Saving*

¹ William Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1888), 91-184, J.H.S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (London: Oxford University, 1960), 210-257, S.A. Burrell, 'The Covenant Idea as a Revolutionary Symbol: Scotland, 1596-1637', *Church History* 27 (1958), Ian B. Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters: 1660-1688* (London: Gollancz, 1976), 11-12, G.D. Henderson, *The Burning Bush* (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1957), 61-74, James Kerr, *The Covenant and the Covenanters* (Edinburgh: R. W. Hunter, 1895), 29-30, James B. Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract? A Study of the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970), James B. Torrance, 'The Covenant Concept in Scottish Theology and Politics and Its Legacy', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34 (1981), Hugh Watt, *Recalling the Scottish Covenants* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Limited, 1946).

² Other nations were influenced by covenant theology, namely the Netherlands and England. The Dutch Republic, while tolerant of Calvinist theology and political theory and having institutions that radically developed federal Calvinism, never fully embraced the covenant idea as an overarching structure and society. See, G. Groenhuis, 'Calvinism and National Consciousness: The Dutch Republic as the New Israel', in *Britain and the Netherlands, VII Church and State since the Reformation*, ed. A.C. Duke and C.A. Tamse (The Hague, 1981), 129. English Puritanism was fragmented between Episcopalians, Baptists, Independents, and Presbyterians, and apart from developing the *Westminster Confession of Faith* never established a comprehensive covenantal society. See Theodore Dwight Bozeman, 'Federal Theology and the 'National Covenant': An Elizabethan Presbyterian Case Study', *Church History* 61 (2004).

Knowledge (1650). This federal theology would largely define eighteenth-century Presbyterianism.

The period from 1690 through the 1820s was one of profound social, economic, political, but also ecclesiastical and theological change. This was a period sandwiched between the period of Post-Reformation orthodoxy and what some have designated the rise of modern Evangelicalism.³ From 1690 Presbyterianism was Scotland's established religion. Scotland's Presbyterianism was confirmed by the parliamentary Act of Union in 1707, and many of Scotland's ministers continued to understand the nation and national Church in the terms of federal theology. Moreover, eighteenth-century Scotland witnessed the diversification of Presbyterianism's ecclesiastical landscape, through a series of secessions which had much to do with the inherited federal theology. The formations of the Associate Presbytery in 1733, the Reformed Presbytery in 1743, and the Relief Presbytery in 1761 owe more to federal theology than generally has been recognized.

There has been relatively little research into the Post-Revolution, Secession and Reformed Presbyterian Churches. There are several reasons for this. First, the historical and theological literature of this period is difficult to interpret. The voluminous evangelical literature produced from 1690 to the 1820s is highly polemical and expressed in often obscure language, while many of the pastor-theologians contributing to this literature were minor figures. Until recently, moreover, much of this literature has been poorly catalogued in research libraries.⁴

Secondly, much of the nineteenth-century historical writing that explores this period reflects the later struggles of Church and State that culminated in the 'Disruption' of the Church of Scotland in 1843 and the formation of the Free Church of Scotland. This literature placed

³ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1-12.

⁴ Gale Networks, *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* has done much to remedy the abyss of pamphlet literature.

emphasis on the Scottish Church's 'spiritual independence' from the State and focused on those seventeenth and eighteenth-century leaders who took a particular interest in asserting the Church's spiritual independence. These works endeavoured to show an unbroken line of Church leaders—from the Reformation to the Disruption of 1843—who continually worked to liberate the Church from State interference, corrupt ecclesiastical politics, and a 'Moderate' theology.⁵ Some of these nineteenth-century histories can be helpful for understanding evangelical concerns within the Established Church during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Yet, they largely neglect the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians.

The difficulty with many of the nineteenth-century histories lies not only in their reading of contemporary conflicts back into the eighteenth century. These histories also tend to reflect 'New Light' perspectives which denigrated both subscription to Scotland's Covenants and the *Westminster Confession's* doctrine 'of Civil Magistracy', and valued Voluntarist principles of a strict separation of Church and State. Even the standard nineteenth-century histories of the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians supported the 'New Light' and Voluntarist Presbyterianism that gained increased influence from the 1820s.⁶ Many twentieth-century historical studies have relied too heavily on this literature.⁷ Adding to the

⁵ For example, Thomas Brown, *Annals of the Disruption* (Edinburgh: McNiven & Wallace, 1893). Henderson, *Burning Bush*, 1-6, commented that 'At the Disruption strange claims were constantly being made by the Free Church to be the veritable descendants of those who suffered in the Covenanting cause'. Robert Buchanan, *The Ten Years Conflict: Being the History of the Disruption*, 3 vols. (Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1863), 1.118ff leaves out the Secession and refers to the eighteenth century as the 'dark age' of 'the Scottish Church'.

⁶ See especially, John M'Kerrow, *History of the Secession Church* (Glasgow: Fullarton, 1841), 667-668, 770. Both William Mackelvie, *Annals and Statistics of the United Presbyterian Church* (Glasgow: Oliphant-Andrew Elliot, 1873), and, David Scott, *Annals and Statistics of the Original Secession Church* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1886), follow M'Kerrow. Gavin Struthers, *History of the Rise of the Relief Church* (Edinburgh: Fullarton and Company, 1848), is critical of the Secession movement and particularly their theology.

⁷ Stewart Mechie, 'The Theological Climate in Early Eighteenth-Century Scotland', in *Reformation and Revolution: Essays Presented to the Very Reverend Principal Emeritus Hugh Watt, D.D., D.Litt. On the Sixtieth Anniversary of His Ordination*, ed. Duncan Shaw (Edinburgh: 1967). Andrew Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688-1843: The Age of Moderates* (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1973). John MacLeod, *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History since the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974).

distortions in accounts of eighteenth-century Scottish Church history is a tendency to dismiss the Secession and Reformed Presbyterian Churches as numerically insignificant or religiously intolerant.⁸

Other studies have taken an overly critical view of eighteenth-century theology. Disliking federal theology in particular, such studies have provided selective interpretations of Scottish Church history that play down the influence of federal theology.⁹ To be sure, some recent studies of eighteenth-century Scottish Church history have offered valuable revision.¹⁰ Unfortunately, some have been piecemeal, largely biographical, and lack a broader historical and theological perspective.¹¹

Arthur Fawcett's *Cambuslang Revival* was a path-breaking study of the background to the evangelical revivals of the 1740s. Fawcett, however, gave little attention to the role that Scotland's Covenants played in the revival movement, or the considerable interest that the 'United Societies' and Seceders took in seeing Scotland revived.¹² John R. McIntosh's *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland* is an insightful study on the 'Popular' party in the Church of Scotland. He demonstrates that the 'Popular' party from 1740-1800 was not a homogenous group of evangelicals and that the 'Popular' clergy shared much in common theologically with the 'Moderate' party. According to McIntosh, the imposition of patronage, rather than doctrinal controversy, was the key issue behind the 'Popular' party.

⁸ Drummond and Bulloch, *Scottish Church*, Andrew Herron, *Kirk by Divine Right*, Baird Lectures (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1985).

⁹ M.C. Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1985). Herron, *Kirk by Divine Right*. John L. Carson, 'The Doctrine of the Church in the Secession' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Aberdeen, 1987). J.B. Torrance, 'Covenant Concept', T. F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John Mcleod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996).

¹⁰ David C. Lachman, *The Marrow Controversy 1718-1723* (Edinburgh: 1988). Kenneth Roxburgh, *Thomas Gillespie and the Origins of the Relief Church in 18th Century Scotland* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999).

¹¹ A.T.B. McGowan, *Federal Theology of Thomas Boston* (Edinburgh: Paternoster, 1997), Phillip Graham Ryken, *Thomas Boston as Preacher of the Fourfold State* (Edinburgh: Paternoster Press, 1999). I. MacLeod, 'The Sacramental Theology and Practice of the Reverend John Willison, 1680-1750' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Glasgow, 2000).

¹² Arthur Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival: The Scottish Evangelical Revival of the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1971).

This has been a helpful corrective to the overly simplified partisan designations of 'Moderates' and 'Evangelicals' which has dominated much of Scottish Church historiography. McIntosh mentions the Seceders, but he exaggerates the role of patronage as the main cause of their break from the Church of Scotland.¹³ D.C. Lachman's *The Marrow Controversy* is an incisive study on the Post-Revolution Church's monumental debate over finer points of federal theology. Lachman prefaced his study by stating that 'No reference will be made to the broader question of the development of Reformed theology as a whole, of the relation of the early Reformers to the later Federal Theology.' Lachman's study narrowly focuses on the fairness of the ecclesiastical debate and how the controversy attempted to 'balance' the doctrine of assurance of salvation within the Reformed tradition and the *Westminster Confession's* parameters.¹⁴

The recent interest in eighteenth-century Trans-Atlantic revivalism has painted a clearer portrait of the period's social, ecclesiastical and theological shifts. However these studies focus almost entirely on the Church of Scotland and the Enlightenment's influences on religion, and neglect the Secession or Reformed Presbyterians' continuity with pre-Enlightenment thought.¹⁵ A recent focus on Scotland's social history has renewed interest in the importance religious belief and national identity. Hence, Callum Brown's *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* has become an essential resource that places Presbyterian religious adherence into the wider context of Scottish history. Unfortunately, Brown relies

¹³ John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: The Popular Party, 1740-1800* (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 1998), 27-28.

¹⁴ Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*, 8.

¹⁵ Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003). David Bebbington, 'Scottish Cultural Influences on Evangelicalism', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 14 (1996), David Bebbington, 'Evangelicalism in Modern Scotland', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 9 (1991). Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625-1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989). Michael J. Crawford, *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England's Revival Tradition in Its British Context* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1991). Ned C. Landsman, 'Presbyterians and Provincial Society: The Evangelical Enlightenment in the West of Scotland, 1740-1775', in *Sociability and Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, ed. John Dwyer and Richard B. Sher (Edinburgh: Mercat, 1993).

heavily on nineteenth-century literature and glosses over the theological controversies within either the Secession or Reformed Presbyterian Churches.¹⁶ Still, most studies on the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians avoid discussion of their 'Covenant' piety as central to their theology and identity. Little is mentioned of the vital importance of federal theology, covenanting ceremonies, and the incessant debates concerning the ecclesiastical and national implications forged by Scotland's history with the covenant idea.¹⁷ Instead, the recent focus has been on their political ambitions.¹⁸ Other scholars simply disdain anything associated with Scotland's Covenanting legacy.¹⁹ Two crucial essays, Hugh Watt's dated but insightful essay, 'Recalling the Scottish Covenants' (1946), and Richard J. Finlay's essay, 'Keeping the Covenant: Scottish National Identity' (1999), demonstrate that Covenant identity was vital for understanding eighteenth-century evangelical Presbyterianism in Scotland's broader history. Finlay highlighted that eighteenth-century evangelicalism's connection with the 'Covenanting tradition' and its 'theological implications' 'is an area which is crying out for further research'.²⁰

There is a need for fresh work on Post-Revolution, Secession and Reformed Presbyterians who comprised Scotland's most vocal evangelical voice throughout the period 1690-1820.

¹⁶ Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 179-182.

¹⁷ There are two exceptions to this. Emily Moberg Robinson, 'Immigrant Covenanters: Religious and Political Identity, from Scotland to America' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of California-Santa Cruz, 2004). Robinson's study offers insight into the social history, but does nothing with the federal theology of the Reformed Presbyterians. Although dated, a sympathetic and helpful study is J.G. Vos, *The Scottish Covenanters* (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, 1980). Originally, this was presented as the author's 1938 Westminster Theological Seminary Master's thesis.

¹⁸ James E. Bradley, and Dale K. Van Kley, ed., *Religion and Politics in Enlightenment Europe* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), Colin Kidd, 'Conditional Britons: The Scots Covenanting Tradition and the Eighteenth-Century British State', *English Historical Review* 117 (2002).

¹⁹ Edward J. Cowan, 'The Covenanting Tradition', in *Scottish History: The Power of the Past*, ed. Edward J. Cowan and Richard J. Finlay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002).

²⁰ Watt, *Recalling the Scottish Covenants*. Richard Finlay, 'Keeping the Covenant: Scottish Identity', in *Eighteenth Century Scotland: New Perspectives*, ed. T.M. Devine (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 1999), 127-128.

With a significant adherence—estimated at around 120,000 at mid-century²¹—these groups occupied a unique historical and theological place in eighteenth-century Scotland.

This thesis is based on a broad survey of original sources, including doctrinal treatises, manuscripts, Presbytery/Synod/General Assembly archives, and published sermons produced between the Revolution Settlement and Re-establishment of Presbyterianism in 1689-90 and the controversial changes in sentiment regarding the civil magistrate's interference in religious matters and the rise of ecclesiastical voluntarism among some Seceders by the early-1820s. We examine how a seventeenth-century form of federal theology was vigorously preserved within Scottish Presbyterianism between 1690 and the 1790s, until a broader evangelicalism began to eclipse the corporate aspects of federal theology by the first half of the nineteenth century. This said, its use of church records has been considerably more restricted than its analysis of the published sources, and the work does not reflect on the possibility that there may have sometimes been disparities between what was published and what was said in the church courts and assemblies of the various denominations. This might be a useful approach for future work on the subject.

It is important to consider our definition of 'evangelical' within the context of late seventeenth and eighteenth-century Scotland. One useful and widely accepted definition of evangelicalism is that of David Bebbington, who first presented what he termed the 'quadrilateral of priorities' that defined the modern evangelical movement in his important study of *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* in 1989. For Bebbington, this 'quadrilateral of priorities' included 'conversionism', or the belief that people needed to be converted from their natural state to a state of grace; 'biblicism', or an emphasis on the Bible as the divinely inspired word of God and containing all knowledge necessary for salvation; 'crucicentrism',

²¹ In 1773, John MacLaurin, *Considerations on the Right of Patronage* (Glasgow: 1766), 26, indicated the strength of dissent. This figure included the Relief Presbytery, which was significantly smaller than the Secession Churches. It did not include the Reformed Presbytery which had around 10,000 adherents according to Brown, *Religion and Society*, 28-29.

or a focus on Christ's sacrifice on the cross and the doctrine of atonement; and 'activism', or the insistence that Christian faith involved a commitment to advance social change in this world, including the elimination of such social evils as slavery.²² Although Bebbington begins his study of modern British evangelicalism in the 1730s, we can discern his 'quadrilateral of priorities' in Scottish pastor-theologians from late seventeenth century. The themes of 'conversionism', 'biblicism', 'crucicentrism' and 'activism' were certainly present within a number of influential Post-Revolution Church ministers' sermons and treatises from the 1690s. However, in addition to Bebbington's four characteristics, many Presbyterian evangelicals also had a fervent commitment to preserve their adherence to the *Westminster Confession*, a heart-felt belief in federal theology's corporate dimensions of the faith as expressed through what many believed to be the ongoing obligations to Scotland's national Covenants, particularly the National Covenant of 1638 and the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, and an intense desire for a national revival of piety to be achieved through a renewed commitment to those Covenants. For Presbyterian evangelicals of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, their 'conversionism', 'biblicism', and 'crucicentricism' were defined through the prism of the *Westminster Confession* (which included the corporate dimensions of federal theology), while their 'activism' found a particular expression through their effort to create a godly society that would reflect the ideal of a covenanted nation.

From 1690 to the 1820s the complex claims of federal theology within Scottish society—firmly connected with the *Westminster Confession*—persistently sparked controversy. The *Confession's* federal Calvinism systematically bound together individual and corporate piety, and asserted distinct views on Church and State. Within the context of a broadening evangelical theology and the thought of the Enlightenment, this study traces both (1) how Scotland's Post-Reformation federal theology still perpetuated an emphasis on corporate

²² Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 15-17.

piety with expectations of ecclesiastical and national revival, and (2) how the gradual, eroding effects of a broadening evangelical theology and the Enlightenment's more democratic, individualistic sentiments put to rest these lingering corporate elements.

Therefore, this thesis seeks to demonstrate how Scotland's federal theology perpetuated the potent ideal of an individual, Church and nation living in covenant with God among eighteenth-century evangelicals.

The emphasis of this thesis is on the theological traditions of the Secession and Reformed Presbyterian Churches in mid to late eighteenth-century Scotland. It does give considerable attention to the evangelical tradition within the established Church of Scotland during the post-Revolution period from 1690 to 1743, a period in which many evangelical ministers of the national Church endeavoured to preserve and express Scotland's Covenants and a federal theology. During these years, many ministers of the national Church did hold firmly to the corporate aspects of federal theology—although the influence of federal theology in the national Church steadily weakened after about 1720. It would be the Secession Churches that would then carry on the covenanting traditions. From 1743, the Reformed Presbytery and the Associate Presbytery began to place new emphasis on the corporate applications of federal theology—calling for a renewal of Scotland's Covenants and a revival of the ideal of a covenanted Church and nation. It was the Reformed Presbyterians and the Secession Churches that preserved the corporate aspects of federal theology during Scotland's 'age of improvement' from the mid-1740s into the early nineteenth century, a period that also witnessed large-scale emigration of Scottish Presbyterians, with their covenanting ideal, to North America. The thesis focuses on their story after 1743, and does not provide a sustained analysis of theological developments within the established Church of Scotland.

Another emphasis of this thesis is on the ideal of a covenanted nation as a foundation for a righteous ecclesiastical and social order. It highlights those doctrines which relate to how

ministers sought to perpetuate the corporate dimensions of piety associated with Scotland's seventeenth-century federal theology. It is not the purpose of this study to analyse the overall system or systems of federal theology among Post-Revolution Church of Scotland, Secession and Reformed Presbyterian evangelicals from 1690 to the 1820s, or to compare the variations in federal theology, apart from the corporate aspects, across Scotland's denominations. Nor does this study analyse in depth the way in which covenant or federal theology was used in preaching for conversion or in the preaching of such doctrines as original sin, salvation by grace, the Atonement, or the doctrine of justification.

Chapter one outlines the background of eighteenth-century federal theology and its influence on Scottish corporate and individual piety. It traces the origins of federal theology as they relate to Scotland, and considers the context of its covenant idea within Post-Reformation Calvinism generally, and more particularly within the Post-Revolution Scottish Church. It demonstrates that Scotland's Covenants were anything but forgotten in the wake of the Revolution Settlement and the re-establishment of Presbyterianism.

Chapter two describes the lingering presence of classic seventeenth-century federal Calvinism among evangelicals. This chapter seeks to show how federal theology was preserved and perpetuated among evangelicals, how they identified Scotland with biblical Israel, and how their longings for national revival came to hinge on the renewal of Covenant obligations.

Chapter three outlines the significance of the *Marrow* controversy for defining an eighteenth-century evangelical consensus on federal theology which emphasized the working of divine grace. The chapter proceeds to describe how the covenant of grace defined individual and corporate piety within a national Covenant ideal. Finally, this chapter considers the effects that the *Marrow* controversy had in prolonging the predominant

influence of federal theology on popular piety, particularly among the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians.

Closely related to chapter three, chapter four considers a further legacy of the *Marrow* controversy—that is, the emphasis on the relationship between the moral law and the covenant of grace. In relating the individual and corporate dimensions of federal theology, the chapter seeks to show the reasons behind the practice of covenanting, and the arguments for the ‘perpetual obligation’ of Scotland’s Covenants on subsequent generations. This chapter also begins to outline the theological attacks that would eventually unravel federal theology’s corporate applications and weaken the Secession Synods’ adherence to the Covenants.

Chapter five examines the application of the covenant idea to the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. This chapter also explores how the sacraments kept alive the social ideal of federal theology and its aspirations for national revival between 1690 and the 1820s. Further, it gives careful consideration to the covenanting ceremonies preserved by the ‘United Societies’ and the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians. We consider how the sacraments and covenanting combined to form dynamic applications of federal theology, and why they were upheld as theological ideals.

Chapter six examines how federal theology’s corporate aspects affected the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians’ views on Church and State and the civil magistracy. We explore the persistent conflicts that federal theology’s corporate applications presented in the eighteenth century, particularly among the Secession Synods. By viewing most of the Secession Synods’ debates within the context of federal theology, we are able to observe how the changing dimensions of the second half of the century gradually put to rest the corporate dimensions of federal theology. Careful consideration is given to how Scotland’s

changing social, political, and intellectual contexts eroded the commitments to a Covenant piety among evangelical Presbyterians.

CHAPTER ONE

SCOTLAND'S 'COVENANT' IDEA

Scotland's seventeenth-century covenanting history has been the subject of scholarly interest since the eighteenth century.¹ A number of recent studies have sought to separate legend from fact and reconstruct the socio-political dimensions behind the Covenanting period. These studies have attempted to rescue history from some previous church historians' biased claims that the Covenanters were the innocent persecuted cross-bearers of a Scottish religion.² Such has been the preoccupation with the Covenanter's radical political theory and religious belief system that much of Scottish historiography has glossed over eighteenth-century Presbyterianism. The exorbitant amount of attention directed at the seventeenth-century political and religious upheavals has led to the assumption that the religious ideology of that period simply vanished with the start of the eighteenth century. Also, there is a tendency to view the eighteenth century as a period enthralled with Enlightenment thought

¹ Gilbert Burnet, *Burnet's History of His Own Time* 2 vols. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1875), Robert Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland from the Restoration to the Revolution*, 4 vols. (Glasgow: Blackie, 1839-1841), attempted to avoid some of the bias of the Cameronian and Society historiography such as Alexander Shields, *A Hind Let Loose: Or, an Historical Representation of the Testimonies of the Church of Scotland...* (Edinburgh: Reprinted by R. Drummond and Company, 1744), James Stewart, *Naphtali, or the Wrestlings of the Church of Scotland...From the Beginning of the Reformation until the Year 1679* (Glasgow: Thomas Crawford, 1721). Each of these works circulated throughout Scotland in the early eighteenth century.

² Several of the most important studies include: Terry Brotherstone, ed., *Covenant, Charter, and Party: Traditions of Revolt and Protest in Modern Scottish History* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University, 1989), John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Edward J. Cowan, *Montrose: For Covenant and King* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), I.B. Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 11-12; 167-171, Gordon Donaldson, *Scotland: James V-James VII* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1978), Mark Fissel, *The Bishops' Wars: Charles I's Campaigns against Scotland, 1638-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Maurice Lee, *The Road to Revolution: Scotland under Charles I, 1625-37* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985), Allan MacInnes, *Charles I and the Making of the Covenanting Movement, 1625-1641* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1991), John Morrill, 'The Scottish National Covenant in Its British Context', in *The Scottish National Covenant in Its British Context*, ed. John Morrill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), David Stevenson, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Scotland 1644-1651* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2003), David Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution: 1637-1644* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2003).

and bi-partisan disputes within the Church of Scotland over theology and politics.³ The middle part of the eighteenth century certainly was defined by such disputes over partisan politics and patronage. However, the general theological impulses which shaped the piety of the Post-Revolution Church in the early part of the eighteenth century have hardly been discussed. By the time of the Revolution Settlement in 1690, the 'covenant idea' had left a profound impression upon Scotland's religious identity and would continue to be an influential aspect of Scottish piety throughout the eighteenth century.

The Transmission of the Covenant Idea to Scotland

The notion of covenant appeared in Judeo-Christian history to express God's revelation to and relationship with his people, both before and after Christ. Covenant theology is a development of that covenant idea, whereby covenant forms the central feature of the entire theological system. The late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries marked the rise of what would become known as 'federal theology' (*foedus*, Latin for covenant). David Weir has designated federal theology as a specific type of covenant theology. In the federal system, every detail is held together by the covenant, which is expressed in terms of a prelapsarian covenant with the first Adam and a postlapsarian covenant with the second Adam, Jesus Christ.⁴ We will use 'covenant theology' and 'federal theology' interchangeably to refer to a theological system that gives structural and thematic attention to the covenantal relationship between God and man. The covenant idea can be seen as broadly encompassing the theological implications of God's relationship with humanity in individual, ecclesiastical, and national spheres.

³ Representative of this is Drummond and Bulloch, *Scottish Church*. See also Stephan Fratt, 'Scottish Theological Trends in the Eighteenth Century: Tensions between 'Head' and 'Heart'' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of California Santa Barbara, 1987), Mechie, 'Theological Climate'. Following the lines set by Friedhelm Voges, 'Moderate and Evangelical Thinking in the Later Eighteenth Century: Differences and Shared Attitudes', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 22 (1985), a seminal study is McIntosh, *Church and Theology*. It has provided a helpful corrective to the largely assumed generalisation that the entirety of eighteenth-century Scottish Church history was a clash between the popular and moderate parties.

⁴ David A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 3-7.

Federal theology, or what the historian James Walker asserted as the 'old theology of Scotland', was to become the dominant feature within Scottish theology following the Reformation.⁵ Recent studies have explored the origination of the covenant motif in sixteenth and early seventeenth-century Reformation theology.⁶ While it is not the intent of this thesis to provide an extensive history of federal theology, it is necessary to highlight some key developments of Scotland's covenant idea and federal theology.

The genesis of a covenant theology in Scotland, stemming from the biblical and theological covenant idea, can be seen in the sixteenth century. Its development was international as theologians interacted with one another. Many Scottish academics and pastors spent time on the Continent and in England during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.⁷ Weir has observed: 'Using Latin they were able to communicate their ideas to each other and to form a spiritual brotherhood which extended from Geneva to Aberdeen.'⁸ The covenant idea rapidly developed from the time of the Reformation. Broadly, it was used to describe the revelation of the Old and New Testaments as the unifying redemptive-historical structure for theological interpretation.⁹ Its development into a more formalized theology was to be

⁵ James Walker, *Theology and Theologians of Scotland 1560-1750* (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1982), 73.

⁶ While there is no single complete study of the development of covenant or federal theology, there are several important studies that cumulatively demonstrate the origins and development of such a theology. Most notably, Lyle D. Bierma, 'Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?' *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983), Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001), David N. J. Poole, *Stages of Religious Faith in the Classical Reformation Tradition: The Covenant Approach to the Ordo Salutis* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd., 1995), Stephen Strehle, *Calvinism, Federalism and Scholasticism: A Study of the Reformed Doctrine of Covenant* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1988), John Von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, ed. Charley Harwick and James O. Duke, American Academy of Religion: Studies in Religion, vol. 45 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), Weir, *Origins of Federal Theology*. Though dated, two excellent studies are W. Adams Brown, 'Covenant Theology', in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (1911), 216-224, John Murray, 'Covenant Theology', in *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Philip E. Hughes (Marshallton: NFCE, 1972).

⁷ Weir, *Origins of Federal Theology*. See also, Andrew Drummond, *The Kirk and the Continent* (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1956).

⁸ Weir, *Origins of Federal Theology*, 1-2.

⁹ Bierma, 'Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?' 304-321, Brown, 'Covenant Theology', 219.

motivated by the Reformers' understanding of justification by faith and the law-gospel distinction.¹⁰

The sixteenth-century beginnings of a covenant theology come out of the Swiss Reformation. The first Reformer who systematically utilized the covenant concept was Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531). Gottfried Locher argued that Zwingli 'rediscovered' the biblical concept of covenant.¹¹ As early as 1526, Zwingli used the covenant idea in defence of paedobaptism, arguing that the covenant of grace extended to the children of believing parents.¹² Zwingli's contribution to an early covenant theology was his emphasis upon the unity of the two Testaments explicitly perceived in terms of a single covenant of grace.¹³ Zwingli's work was carried forward by his successor Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575). In 1534, Bullinger published the first Reformed treatise devoted to explaining the covenant of grace entitled *De Testamento seu foedere Dei unico et aeterno Heinrichi Bullineri brevis Expositio*. He viewed the covenant of grace as a summary of biblical theology.¹⁴ Moreover, the covenant also had social implications for Bullinger.¹⁵ He envisioned that in a 'truly' Christian society, the covenant obligations of justice and worship regulated by the Bible would be met.¹⁶ Martin Bucer (1491-1551) and John Oecolampadius (d.1531), perhaps influenced by both Zwingli and Bullinger's formulations, made use of the covenant idea in their theologies as well.¹⁷ For John Calvin (1509-1564), as for Bullinger, the covenant was

¹⁰ Mark W. Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 20.

¹¹ Gottfried W. Locher, 'Zwingli's Thought. New Perspectives', *Studies in the History of Christian Thought* 25 (1981): 114.

¹² Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract?' 62.

¹³ Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective*, 20.

¹⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G.W. Bromiley & T. F. Torrance, vol. IV (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958-), 57. See also J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Traditions* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980).

¹⁵ Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 11.

¹⁶ Poole, *Stages of Religious Faith*, 117-118.

¹⁷ Baker, *Federalism*, 21-22.

viewed as the way of God's salvation throughout the whole of history.¹⁸ Calvin saw predestination as the basis of inclusion into God's covenant of grace. The covenant was the framework for which God dealt with His elect in all ages.¹⁹ However, much debate surrounds Calvin's conception of a covenant theology.²⁰ As Lillback has stated:

Calvin is the first of the early theologians to integrate the covenant concept extensively into his theological system. Thus covenant theology owes its existence in various ways to Calvin. His subtle weaving of the covenant into his system has caused many to overlook its presence altogether. Because others could not find it in a *locus*, they assumed it was not present. Yet the covenant was pivotal and presuppositional for Calvin's theology. By using the covenant extensively and in new ways, Calvin provided the foundation upon which later generations of Reformed scholars could build the federal system... We must, of course, stop short of calling Calvin a federalist.²¹

Scotland participated in the development of an international covenant theology, one that was developing across the Continent and Britain. John Knox (1514-1572) was more of a preacher and polemicist than a systematic theologian. It has been suggested that Knox was influenced by the theology of England's William Tyndale (1494-1536), himself influenced by Zwingli, Oecolmpadias and Bullinger.²² Knox effectively utilized the covenant theme for both theology and politics during the Scottish Reformation.²³ In *A summary, according to the Holy Scriptures, of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper* (1550), Knox portrayed the Sacrament in terms of a covenant. It was 'a band of mutuall love amangis us'.²⁴ Later, in 1554, Knox produced an exposition of Psalm 6 in which he noted the 'leag and felowschip that is betuene God and his elect'.²⁵ Richard Greaves has described *An Admonition or Warning That the Faithful Christians in London, Newcastle, Barwycke & Others, May*

¹⁸ Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 194. Although the Reformed tradition is indebted to John Calvin more than any other individual Reformer, there is no scholarly consensus on the place of covenant in his development of theology. However, it is fair to say that the covenant idea, as well as an under developed form of covenant theology, at least comes indirectly through his theological writings. Much debate surrounds the influence of a covenant theology in Calvin's writings. The most comprehensive study on Calvin and covenant theology is Lillback, *Binding of God*.

¹⁹ Baker, *Bullinger and the Covenant*, 193-198.

²⁰ This debate has voluminosly progressed over the last sixty years. For a recent and comprehensive bibliography on the federal tradition, see Weir, *Origins of Federal Theology*.

²¹ Lillback, *Binding of God*, 311.

²² Leonard J. Trinterud, 'The Origins of Puritanism', *Church History* 20 (1951): 40.

²³ Richard L. Greaves, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation: Studies in the Thought of John Knox* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1980), 114-125.

²⁴ David Laing, ed., *The Works of John Knox* 6 vols., vol. iii (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1895), 74.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, iii:143.

auoide Gods Vengeauce as Knox's basic treatment of a covenant theology.²⁶ Knox's primary concern was for Scotland to be a holy nation free from the idolatry of Roman Catholicism. He also used the covenant idea as a religious and political tool to contend for the rights of Scotland and England against a monarchy unsupportive of the Protestant cause.²⁷ Knox's followers would further develop the potent implications of the covenant idea, not only for national alliances against a common enemy but also for instilling an Old Testament paradigm descriptive of God's relationship with Scotland. This was to become the source of a national covenanting ideal as we shall see.

The most systematic presentation of covenant theology, which came to be known as federal theology, emerged in the Rhineland. Two of the more significant Reformed covenant theologians of the late sixteenth century, both students of Calvin, were the chief authors of the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1562), Caspar Olevianus (1536-87) and Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83). Olevianus' book, *On the Substance of the Covenant of Grace between God and the Elect* (1585) is believed to be the first development of a covenant of redemption or a pre-temporal pact between the Father and the Son. Olevianus also employed the terms 'covenant of creation' and 'legal covenant'.²⁸ He emphasized that the work of Christ was the foundation of the covenant and also the key to its administration. In this way, Olevianus maintained the unity of the work of salvation (between the Father and Son) and God's biblical covenants with his people by establishing both within a formal covenant theology. Olevianus may be seen as the 'torch-bearer of a developing federal theology on the Continent'.²⁹ Ursinus was significant not only in the continued development of covenant theology but also its rapid dissemination with his *Summa Theologiae* (also known as the

²⁶ Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, 115-117.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 124, 125.

²⁸ Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 196.

²⁹ Poole, *Stages of Religious Faith*, 150.

Major Catechism).³⁰ Ursinus spoke of a 'natural covenant', one that was made prior to the covenant of grace. He is known to be one of the first Protestant theologians, along with Dudley Fenner (1558-1587), to propose a prelapsarian covenant in a formal theological treatise.³¹ It was this idea that would lead to notions of God's two covenants with humanity; one broken by human sin and the other established by divine grace.³² More importantly, both Olevianus and Ursinus' covenant theology in the Heidelberg Catechism would make its way to Scotland by 1590.³³

Robert Rollock, the first Principal of the University of Edinburgh and previously professor of theology and head of the Arts faculty at St. Andrews University was significant for his seminal expositions of covenant theology *Quaestiones et Responsiones aliquot de Foedere Dei* and *Tractatus de Vocatione Efficaci* (1597). In the *Tractatus*, he clearly espoused a federal theology with a prelapsarian covenant of works and a covenant of grace. He even asserted that every aspect of Scripture related to God's covenants:

Now therefore, we are to speak of the Word, or of the Covenant of God...All the word of God appertains to some covenant; for God speaks nothing to man without the covenant...Every reasonable creature must of necessity be liable to one of both covenants, either that of works, or this of grace...Man must be under some one covenant Adam, in the state of innocency, was under the covenant of works. Man, after the fall abideth under the covenant of works; and to this day life is promised him under condition of works done by strength of nature.³⁴

Rollock also argued that 'the greatest part of the Old Testament is spent propounding, repeating, and expounding the Covenant of Works.'³⁵ In developing this idea of a covenant of works, it is likely that he was influenced by the Continental Reformers, principally

³⁰ Ibid., 141-143, Derk Visser, 'The Covenant in Zacharius Ursinus', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987): 431-544.

³¹ Weir, *Origins of Federal Theology*, 59,99-109.

³² Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 196.

³³ Henderson, *Burning Bush*, 66-67.

³⁴ W.M. Gunn, ed., *The Select Works of Robert Rollock*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Wodrow Society, 1844-1849), I:33, 51-52.

³⁵ Ibid., I:43.

Olevianus and Ursinus.³⁶ Rollock claimed that he ‘diligently trained’ his University of Edinburgh students ‘in the [*Heidelberg*] catechism of the Palatinate’.³⁷ It also appears that he was influenced both by Andrew Melville, who had introduced Ramist logic³⁸ at St. Andrews two years before Rollock was appointed head of the Arts Faculty in 1580, and by the Scot Robert Howie (1568?-1646). Howie was the first principal of Marischal College, Aberdeen, and was later appointed principal of St. Mary’s College, St. Andrews by James VI. Howie had studied at Herborn from 1585 to 1588 where he came under the teaching of the covenant theologian Johannes Piscator (1546-1625), former colleague of Ursinus and Olevianus at Heidelberg.³⁹ The teaching of Olevianus ‘left easily discernable marks on Howie’ which can be seen in his *De Reconciliatione Hominis cum Deo* (1591).⁴⁰ Howie would also endorse the National Covenant in 1638⁴¹ and it is likely that he was first to convey German Reformed federal theology to Scotland.⁴²

William Ames (1576-1633) was a student of the English Puritan William Perkins (1558-1602). Ames would later serve as professor of theology in Holland where he came into contact with Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669). Ames became the key contributor in the development of the federal theology which dominated Puritanism in England and Scotland’s Presbyterianism into the eighteenth century.⁴³ His most influential work, *Medulla*

³⁶ Rollock’s correspondence listed Theodore Beza and Simon Goulart, both of whom were Genevan Reformers successive of John Calvin. Ibid., I:10, II:vi-vii.

³⁷ Ibid., I:lvxi.

³⁸ James Kerr Cameron, ed., *Letters of John Johnston, C.1565-1611 and Robert Howie, C.1565-C.1645* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), xxv, Robert Letham, ‘The *Foedus Operum*: Some Factors Accounting for Its Development’, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14 (1983). Letham maintains that the spread of federal theology coincided with Ramist logic and its predilection toward the bifurcation of ideas. Ramist methodology, developed by Peter Ramus (1515-1572), was a philosophical approach to education that contended that an entire field of knowledge could be organised for instant comprehension by reducing it to a dichotomous subdivision.

³⁹ Letham, ‘*Foedus Operum*’: 463-66.

⁴⁰ Cameron, ed., *Letters*, xxv.

⁴¹ Ibid., xxxi.

⁴² Henderson, *Burning Bush*, 67.

⁴³ Poole, *Stages of Religious Faith*, 202-203.

Theologica (1623), was used as a textbook in Scotland and exerted a profound influence upon Scottish theology well into the nineteenth century.⁴⁴

The little known Johannes Cloppenburg (1592-1652) is considered the forerunner of Cocceius' federal theology. According to Poole, 'so important is the covenant to Cloppenburg that it is contained in his definition of religion'.⁴⁵ Poole further observed that 'prior to Cocceius, the most detailed promulgation of the double covenant doctrine was set out by Cloppenburg'.⁴⁶ Significantly, Cloppenburg's work became influential in Scotland prior to the publication of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646). G.D. Henderson asserted: 'Not to be overlooked is the influence of the Franeker teacher, Cloppenburgius, a clear exponent of Federal Theology, whose works were esteemed in Scotland. Many of them found their way into university libraries and in 1645 Robert Baillie expressed thanks for a volume of Cloppenburgius just received'.⁴⁷

The seventeenth-century development of covenant theology in the Netherlands has often been considered the zenith of Reformed federal theology.⁴⁸ This can be seen most clearly in the work of William Ames' student Cocceius who was notable for writing an exhaustive account of the biblical covenants in *Summa Doctrinae de Foedere et Testamento Dei* (1648) which became a classic statement of Reformed federal theology.⁴⁹ Like many of the earlier federal theologians, he saw the history of salvation as the expression of the eternal covenant of redemption. He sharply distinguished between the covenant of works as Law and the covenant of grace as Gospel. Drummond maintained that 'Coccejius will continue to occupy

⁴⁴ Henderson, *Burning Bush*, 71. The only English systematic theology owned by Thomas Boston was Ames' *Medulla*. According to Ryken, *Fourfold State*, 16, 24, 32-33, 73, 122-123, 243, 308. An early eighteenth-century minister in Ross-shire from 1714-1723, Daniel MacKillican, lists the *Medulla* as one of his personal divinity books as well. See Donald MacLean, 'Highland Libraries in the Eighteenth Century', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 31 (1927): 92-94.

⁴⁵ Poole, *Stages of Religious Faith*, 222.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁴⁷ Henderson, *Burning Bush*, 71.

⁴⁸ Baker, *Federalism*, 63-79.

⁴⁹ Strehle, *Calvinism, Federalism and Scholasticism: A Study of the Reformed Doctrine of Covenant* 222-243.

an honourable place among foreigners who have influenced our Scottish theology'.⁵⁰

Cocceius was opposed by Gisbert Voetius (1589-1676) and their conflict in turn created tension within the Dutch theological schools.⁵¹ While the debate itself had little direct impact in Scotland—largely dealing with the emphasis placed on either exegetical theology (Cocceian) or a more scholastic systematic theology (Voetian)—it is obvious that both Cocceius' and Voetius' writings were significant in popularising covenant theology in Scotland.⁵² Henderson noted that Voetius was often mentioned by Baillie and Rutherford in their correspondence with Holland and in their theological works. By 1649, Baillie had received Cocceius' *Summa*.⁵³ Patrick Gillespie's (1617-1675) *Ark of the Testament Opened* (1661) and *Ark of the Covenant Opened* (1671) heavily referenced Cocceius, even recommending his works on covenant theology. *The Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence* (1692), a satirical and anti-covenant treatise published soon after the Revolution, caustically mentioned the influence of Dutch Reformed thought in Scotland.⁵⁴

Herman Witsius (1636-1708) attempted to establish continuity between the divided covenant systems of the Cocceians and the Voetians. Witsius' *De Oeconomia Foedere Dei cum Hominibus* (1677) identified the covenant of works with the Law and the covenant of grace with the Gospel. This work became extremely significant in Scotland in its use as a

⁵⁰ Drummond, *Kirk and Continent*, 129. Henderson, *Burning Bush*, 72, takes the opposite view. He stated, albeit somewhat confusingly, 'The strict Covenanters were, however decidedly hostile to the trend of Coccejian doctrine generally. This is clear from Michael Shields's account of the Society meetings, while letters from Scots students at Leyden in the early eighteenth century indicate that though the Coccejian party was then dominant in Holland, it had no attractions for them. It is therefore doubtful whether Coccejus's system as such was at all popular in Scotland, though Gillespie in particular quotes him with hearty approval.' Drummond agreed that some of Cocceius biblical 'interpretation, but not covenant theology, were not welcomed by Michael Shields', 130. Despite Henderson's view, it is clear that Cocceius influenced leading Scottish theologians and students.

⁵¹ J.I. Israel, *Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 660-669, 892-896.

⁵² G. D. Henderson, 'Dutch Influences in Scottish Theology', *Evangelical Quarterly* 5 (1933): 38.

⁵³ Henderson, *Burning Bush*, 72.

⁵⁴ Gilbert Crockatt, *The Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence...* 1718 ed. (Dublin: J. Hyde, 1692), 55.

theological textbook for training ministers. Witsius' arrangement of federal theology would shape eighteenth-century covenant theology and ensure its impact on popular piety.⁵⁵

Perhaps the most influential and controversial religious book published in eighteenth-century Scotland was the *Marrow of Modern Divinity*. Published anonymously in England with the initials 'E.F.' in 1645, the *Marrow* professed to give the pith of the teaching of Reformed divines. It highlighted the diverse theological opinions over a 'legal' and 'evangelical' understanding of federal Calvinism. Although there is evidence that the book was read in seventeenth-century Scotland,⁵⁶ it did not gain significance until it was reprinted by James Hog (1658-1734) in 1718 upon the recommendation of Thomas Boston (1676-1732). This led to the heated *Marrow* controversy in the Church of Scotland (1718-1723) and the General Assembly's subsequent condemnation of the book as heterodox. The first section of the *Marrow* was an exposition of the federal system. The rest of the *Marrow* was a practical dialogue of fictitious characters concerning how federal theology affected the Christian life. The effects of the *Marrow* on Scotland were great. It renewed an evangelical zeal for preaching on the theme of God's covenantal relationship with His people. It also reinforced the practical nature of federal theology on popular piety. Moreover, many of the most vocal supporters of the *Marrow* would continue to advocate the obligations to Scotland's Covenants after the 1733 Secession from the Church of Scotland, when the Associate Presbytery was formed.

The seventeenth century became the defining period of federal theology on an international scale, while in Scotland, seventeenth-century federal theology quickly became the foundation of practical piety, and was embraced by Scottish academics and pastors alike. David Dickson (1589-1662) co-authored with his student James Durham (1622-1658) *The*

⁵⁵ MacLeod, *Scottish Theology*, 219, Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract?' 64.

⁵⁶ James Fraser, *Memoirs of the Life of the Very Reverend Mr. James Fraser of Brea* (Edinburgh: Thomas Lumisden and John Robertson, 1738), 305. Fraser mentioned that he 'was much helped by the *Marrow of Modern Divinity*' in his calling into ministry.

Sum of Saving Knowledge (1650).⁵⁷ Perhaps, the clearest statement of federal theology to that time, it was bound with the *Westminster Confession* and widely circulated throughout Scotland.⁵⁸ Dickson also wrote the first commentary on the *Westminster Confession*.⁵⁹ His *Therapeutica Sacra* first appeared in 1648 the same year as Cocceius' *Summa*. John Macleod stated that 'Scottish Covenant theology could never be spoken of as Cocceianism' because Dickson had been developing his theology prior to Cocceius.⁶⁰ Not widely published until 1656, *Therapeutica Sacra* expounded upon a three-covenant system of theology with the covenant of works (or nature), a covenant of redemption (between the Father and the Son) and the covenant of grace (between Christ and humanity) forming the main divisions.

Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), revered for the sagacity of his *Lex Rex* in promoting a constitutional form of government, sought to present covenant thought in practical discourses.⁶¹ He maintained a two-covenant systematization (of works and grace) in his *Catechism* but often spoke of a covenant of redemption as the foundation of the covenant of grace.⁶² The key works in which he discussed covenant theology are *The Tryl & Triumph of Faith* (1645) and *The Covenant of Life Opened: Or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (1655). These works provided the most comprehensive account of federal theology in Britain up to that time and also became authoritative texts in defining the covenant idea in Scotland.⁶³ Rutherford was one of the five Scottish ministers appointed to represent the Scottish Church at the Westminster Assembly of Divines in 1643-1648, when the clearest confessional articulation of federal theology was finalized. Alexander Henderson (1583-

⁵⁷ Robert Wodrow, *Analecta: Or Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences; Mostly Relating to Scotch Ministers and Christians*, 4 vols., vol. III (Edinburgh: Printed for the Maitland Club, 1843), 10.

⁵⁸ Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 112.

⁵⁹ MacLeod, *Scottish Theology*, 84.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

⁶¹ Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 102.

⁶² Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology*, 73-74.

⁶³ Baker, *Federalism*, 43.

1646), Robert Baillie (1599-1662), Robert Douglas (1594-1674) (who did not attend the Assembly), and George Gillespie (1613-1649) all covenant theologians, were also appointed. Patrick Gillespie (1617-1675) articulated a practical federal theology in his influential *Ark of the Testament Opened* (1661) and *Ark of the Covenant Opened* (1671).⁶⁴ William Guthrie's (1620-1665) *The Christian's Great Interest* (1658?) detailed the intimacy of God's covenant relationship with believers. *The Christian's Great Interest* would have a profound influence upon eighteenth-century Scottish piety with its numerous republications.⁶⁵ It also served as a model for evangelical preaching, with its emphasis on the intimate nature of the believer being covenanted with Christ.⁶⁶ This emphasis in preaching would be carried into the eighteenth century.

Seventeenth-Century Developments

Gordon Donaldson has argued that federal theology was significant in the development of a national covenanting ideal prior to the advent of the National Covenant in 1638. He saw a connection between federal theology and a national covenantal consciousness. This connection was found to be interwoven into the politics leading to the 1638 'covenant revolution'.⁶⁷ David Mullan has outlined the history of national covenanting and 'banding' to 1638. He also has illustrated some of the complexities of its relationship to federal theology.⁶⁸ For Mullan, 'there are pronounced ambiguities in the attempt to demonstrate the centrality of federal theology to the history of Scotland in the period leading up to the National Covenant'.⁶⁹ Whatever the exact developmental relationship might have been, federal theology and the idea of a nation in covenant with God intermingled. Scotland's

⁶⁴ Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology*, 116, maintains that Patrick, and not his brother George, authored both treatises.

⁶⁵ Adam Philip, *The Devotional Literature of Scotland* (London: James Clarke & Company, Limited, 1922), 37-39. MacLeod, *Scottish Theology*, 91.

⁶⁶ Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 152.

⁶⁷ Donaldson, *Scotland: James V-James VII*, 314-316.

⁶⁸ David G. Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 171-207.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 207.

notion of covenant included both a national theme and one endeared to personal and practical piety.

Scotland was familiar with the practice of national 'banding' or 'bonding' since the Reformation.⁷⁰ These early religio-political agreements of Scotland were purposed at establishing and defending the Protestant cause at the Reformation. Perhaps the first religious 'band' in Scotland occurred in 1556 when Knox was visiting the Laird of Dun. There is no evidence, other than Knox himself, to convince us of it being anything more than a personal agreement toward reforming Scotland in the Protestant sense. Both Lumsden and Greaves have indicated that what took place, according to Knox, was that after a celebration of the Lord's Supper the gentlemen of Mearns agreed to renounce Roman Catholic practices, namely the Mass, and 'band' themselves together in order to maintain the true preaching of the gospel.⁷¹ Again, on 3 December 1557, several noblemen, including the Earls of Argyll, Glencairn, and Morton, called upon God to witness their 'bond' to uproot 'Roman idolatry, and to promote the blessed Word of God'.⁷² Knox also referred to other Covenants sworn at Perth in May 1559; at Edinburgh in July 1559; at Stirling in August 1559; at Leith in April of 1560; Ayr in September 1562; at Newcastle in March 1566; at Edinburgh in July 1567 and May 1568; and at Leith in July 1572.⁷³ These covenants or bands, notwithstanding royal and priestly opposition, largely contributed to Roman Catholicism's overthrow in Scotland in 1560. Moreover, the beginnings of a persistent attitude toward the maintenance of the Protestant cause against 'Papal' ideology, 'tyrannical' rule, and the continuance of the 'Reformation of Religion' were in place to influence Scotland's religious identity for years

⁷⁰ Burrell, 'Revolutionary Symbol': 339-ff, G. D. Henderson, *Religious Life in xvii Century Scotland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 162-163.

⁷¹ Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, 121, John Lumsden, *The Covenants of Scotland* (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1914), 19-20.

⁷² Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London: Pimlico, 1992), 190, Jenny Wormald, *Court, Kirk, and Community: Scotland 1470-1625* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 111. Both Lynch and Wormald see this as the first official covenant of a religio-political nature.

⁷³ David Hay Fleming, *The Story of the Scottish Covenants* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1904), 8-17, Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, 121-122.

to come. Thus, the idea behind a national Covenant was not a new occurrence in Scotland with the advent of the 1638 National Covenant and 1643 Solemn League and Covenant. In fact, Torrance and Lumsden have indicated that as many as thirty-one 'covenants' or 'bands,' local and national, were formulated between 1556 and 1686.⁷⁴

In 1580-81 another 'band', or religious oath, variously entitled the *Second Confession of Faith*, the *King's Confession*, or the *Negative Confession*, was sworn by James VI and several leading aristocrats abjuring Roman Catholicism. This Protestant confession was to give national covenanting its significant place in the religious identity of Scotland. The idea of banding and covenanting converged into a singular concept with the *Negative Confession*. E.J. Cowan has demonstrated that James Carmichael was the first to call the *Negative Confession* a covenant in 1586.⁷⁵ The General Assembly of 1596 witnessed John Davidson (c.1560-1604) of Prestonpans exhorting his colleagues to 'covenant' with God in an effort to see a renewed spiritual zeal come over Scotland. Henderson noted that some 'four hundred persons, mostly ministers, are said to have been present' for this act of Covenant renewal.⁷⁶ Similar events of Covenant renewal were to happen throughout Scotland in the late sixteenth century. James Melville (1556-1614) referred to a renewal of the *Negative Confession* at the Synod of Fife in 1596. These Covenant renewals aimed at both spiritual revival as well as political organisation when the 'reformation of religion' in Scotland appeared to be threatened.⁷⁷ Arthur Williamson has credited Robert Bruce (1554-1631) with connecting federal theology and the social interactions of Scotland. Moreover, he maintained that the idea of a national Covenant became from this time 'firmly fixed in Scottish thinking as a feature of popular piety' and that a 'typological connection between the Jewish experience

⁷⁴ Lumsden, *Covenants of Scotland*, 2-225, Torrance, 'Covenant Concept': 226.

⁷⁵ Cowan, *Montrose*, 29-30.

⁷⁶ Henderson, *Burning Bush*, 62-63.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

and Scotland tightened considerably.⁷⁸ Consequently, Scotland began to view itself in a special relationship with God akin to biblical Israel. This national ideal, coupled with a developing federal theology, provided the means for the development of an evangelical piety centred around the covenant idea.

Charles I's attempt to impose a new liturgy upon the Scottish Church brought revolution to Scotland. A national Covenant, useful during the Reformation from 'Popery' in the sixteenth century, was again found to be useful in bonding Christians together in opposition to Prelacy. Archibald Johnston of Warriston (1611-1663) and Alexander Henderson (1583-1646) were the primary authors of the National Covenant (1638).⁷⁹ The document consisted of three sections. It began by repeating the *Negative Confession* of 1581 to emphasize the rejection of all Roman Catholic-like and Erastian tendencies. This was a clear allusion to Episcopacy. The second section detailed the numerous *Acts* that the Scottish parliament had issued against Roman Catholicism since the Reformation. In the final section of the document, the signatories covenanted 'before God and man' in the endeavour 'to recover the purity and liberty of the Gospel' so that 'religion and righteousness may flourish in the land to the Glory of God, the honour of our King, and peace and comfort of us all'.⁸⁰ Copies of the document were to appear all over Scotland, and individuals and entire congregations would subscribe to it in solemn dedication ceremonies.⁸¹ Soon the Glasgow Assemblies of 1638 and 1639 would solidify the 'Second' Reformation of Scotland through a Presbyterian hegemony and conflict with Charles I.

In 1643, the Solemn League and Covenant was signed wherein Protestant representatives from Scotland, England and Ireland pledged themselves to promote and preserve the

⁷⁸ Arthur H. Williamson, *Scottish National Consciousness in the Age of James VI: Apocalypse, the Union and the Shaping of Scotland's Public Culture* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 2003), 74-75.

⁷⁹ Stevenson, *Scottish Revolution*, 83.

⁸⁰ The 'National Covenant' (1638) from Lumsden, *Covenants of Scotland*.

⁸¹ Stevenson, *Scottish Revolution*, 83.

Reformed faith throughout the three kingdoms. It was both a religious covenant and a civil league. The object of the Solemn League was not only the reformation of religion, but also the 'endeavour to bring the churches of GOD in the three Kingdoms, to the nearest Conjunction and Uniformity in Religion, Confession of Faith, Form of Church-government, Directory for Worship, and Catechising; That we and our Posterity after us, may, as Brethren, live in Faith and Love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us'.⁸² However, only the Scots supported this objective. The English Parliamentary party, while initially making concessions to the Solemn League and Covenant in exchange for military aid against Charles I, were to abandon it, while it never found much support in Ireland, outside the Scottish Settlement in Ulster.

Ultimately, neither the English Parliament nor the British monarchy would embrace the terms of either Covenant document. Scotland's Covenanting movement failed internally as well. The dissention between the Resolutioners and the Protesters within the Scottish Parliament thwarted any hope of the Covenanters' ideal being established in Scotland.⁸³ Nevertheless, this did not diminish the implications that these documents would have on the Presbyterian consciousness. The notions of 'banding' and 'covenanting' in a religio-political sense had the effect of establishing an ideal that was directly related to the evangelical Protestant cause. The Covenanters would 'Presbyterianize' this cause in their struggle against Episcopacy and Erastianism.⁸⁴ They implicitly envisioned the National Covenant to mean 'the true worship of God' as Reformed and covenantal in theology and Presbyterian in

⁸² The 'Solemn League and Covenant' (1643) from Lumsden, *Covenants of Scotland*.

⁸³ Two separate parties emerged within the covenanting movement and Church of Scotland. The Protesters were those who supported a remonstrance presented to the Commission of the General Assembly in 1650. The remonstrance denounced what the protesters believed to be an insincere compliance to the Covenants by Charles II. The Resolutioners on the other hand, believed this to be a treasonous position towards the monarch. Resolutioners also approved of the 'Public Resolutions' of Parliament (1650), repealing laws that obstructed the raising of an army for the defence of Scotland. The actions of the General Assembly in 1651 against the Protester party solidified a division in the Church of Scotland that remained until the restoration of the monarchy and the re-imposition of Episcopacy. See especially, Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 30-34.

⁸⁴ Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism*, 322.

polity.⁸⁵ Henceforth, Scotland's Covenant ideal would be associated directly with Presbyterianism. National covenanting also had the effect of correlating the idea of reforming and reviving a troubled, damaged, or impure religion with an historic cause that dated from the time of the Reformation. Moreover, Presbyterians were also to emphasize the binding obligation of the 'National Covenants'—both documents—upon successive generations. The National Covenant stated explicitly that: 'the present and succeeding generations in this land are bound to keep the foresaid national oath and subscription inviolable'.⁸⁶ These ideas persisted into the eighteenth century and formed a conspicuous aspect of evangelical Presbyterianism.

Federal Theology and Confessional Statements

Seventeenth-century Scottish theologians continued to promote federal theology and its corporate applications through the politically volatile National and Solemn League and Covenants. As a consequence of these Covenant documents and the warfare of the 1640s in all three kingdoms, the English Parliament called the convention of the Westminster Assembly of 1643-1649. Federal theology would receive its first confessional expression in the *Irish Articles* (particularly article 21), but the clearest definition of federal theology was produced in the *Westminster Confession*. From the time of the *Westminster Confession* onwards federal theology was the standard theological statement of Scottish Presbyterian thought. More importantly, the development and acceptance of the *Westminster Confession*, along with numerous catechisms and the *Sum of Saving Knowledge* which often accompanied its publication, deeply rooted the covenant idea in Scottish popular piety. As Weir observed, 'it was the Puritans in England, and the Presbyterians in Scotland who

⁸⁵ Morrill, 'British Context', 12.

⁸⁶ The 'National Covenant' from Lumsden, *Covenants of Scotland*. It is interesting that the Solemn League and Covenant did not include the same mandate. However, covenanters saw it as perpetually binding as well.

popularized the idea for the common people by removing it from the domain of Latin treatises and placing it in the forefront of popular piety'.⁸⁷

With the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658 (who had little sympathy with Scotland's Covenants), and the 'Restoration' of both the Stuart monarchy and Episcopacy in 1660, Charles II withdrew any feigned expressions of support he might have given to the Covenants and Scottish Presbyterianism. From 1660-1688, the monarchy endeavoured to suppress not only Scotland's Covenants, but anything having to do with the covenant idea. The Act Rescissory (1661) restored Episcopacy in Scotland. The Conventicle Act (1670) disallowed outdoor worship services of Presbyterians. The Test Act (1681) required all in public office to renounce the Covenants. The Covenanters attempted to resist the monarchy's imposition of Episcopacy. Armed rebellions in defence of Scotland's Covenants culminated in the Battle of the Pentlands (1666) and the Battle of Bothwell Bridge (1679). While both rebellions ended in failure and were harshly suppressed by government troops, many continued to advocate varying degrees of resistance. In 1685, Charles II died and his son James VII and II, a Roman Catholic, came to the throne. This phase of the Covenanting period, 1685-1688, known as the 'Killing Time', was an exceedingly dark epoch in Scotland's history. Yet it would produce notions of revival which centred-around the covenant idea—both from Scotland's Covenants and practical divinity promulgated by federal theology.⁸⁸ The concept of the 'covenant' was for those Scots who embraced the Presbyterian religion the salient idea of the seventeenth century, and an ideal that would continue among eighteenth-century evangelical Presbyterians.

Revolution Settlement and the 'Covenant' Idea

In 1688 James VII and II, who seemed to be moving toward restoring Roman Catholicism in Britain, was forced by the resistance of the English Whigs and the invasion of the Dutch

⁸⁷ Weir, *Origins of Federal Theology*, 2.

⁸⁸ Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 39-41.

Stadtholder, William of Orange, to flee to France. Both the English and Scots were cognizant of Louis XIV's treatment of the Huguenots after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. The English Parliament was determined that England would remain Protestant and thereby invited William of Orange and his wife Mary Stuart to the throne. The Scottish Convention of Estates followed suit after declaring James' forfeiture of the Scottish throne.⁸⁹

William was persuaded that to maintain Episcopacy in Scotland was not to his immediate political advantage.⁹⁰ In his message to the 1690 Estates, William envisaged a 'moderate' establishment of Presbyterianism. It was to be founded on the doctrinal standard of the *Westminster Confession* and the ecclesiastical polity defined by the Act of 1592.⁹¹

Scotland's Covenants, however, were omitted along with Westminster's *Directory of Public Worship*. The exclusion of the Covenants meant there was no requirement to assent to the divine right of presbytery. More importantly, it threatened the notion of Scotland's unique covenantal relationship with God. The omission of the *Directory* demonstrated that Presbyterian practice would not be as narrowly defined as it was in the 1640s-1650s.

William III hoped that these omissions would enable many Episcopalians to conform.⁹² The inclusion of the *Westminster Confession* alone places the re-established Presbyterian Church within the Calvinist tradition; but it also meant the Church was to be comprehended in

⁸⁹ Burleigh, *Church History*, 251-252, Rosiland Mitchison, *A History of Scotland*, Third ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 274.

⁹⁰ Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 137. L.K.J. Glassey, 'William II and the Settlement of Religion in Scotland, 1688-1690', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 23 (1989): 322. See also two-part study by Thomas Maxwell, 'William III and the Scots Presbyterians: Part I.--the Crisis in Whitehall', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 15 (1966), Thomas Maxwell, 'William III and the Scots Presbyterians: Part II', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 15 (1966). Maxwell has pointed out that the struggle between Episcopacy and Presbyterian forms of government was not easily resolved at the Revolution Settlement (1690). He indicated that William would have preferred a unified form of church polity for both Scotland and England. The *Act for Settling the Peace and Quiet of the Church* (1693) demonstrated that neither the king nor politicians were committed to a strict Presbyterian Establishment. Political manoeuvrings between the Presbyterians and William would continue until 1694.

⁹¹ Maxwell, 'William III and the Scots Presbyterians: Part II': 182.

⁹² George Grub, *An Ecclesiastical History of Scotland*, 4 vols., vol. III (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1861), 304.

broader terms than the remaining Covenanters would have preferred. In a message to the re-established General Assembly in 1690, undoubtedly endorsed by his Presbyterian chaplain William Carstares (1649-1715), William III set the tone of what would define eighteenth-century Scottish religion:

‘A calm and peaceable procedure will be no less pleasing to us than it becometh you. We never could be of the mind that violence was suited to the advancement of true religion nor do we intend that our authority shall ever be a tool to the irregular passions of any party. Moderation is what religion enjoins, neighbouring churches expect from you, and we recommend to you.’⁹³

The Assembly’s commissioners were instructed to exclude ministers only for reasons of scandal or obvious incapacity, while those ‘orthodox in doctrine, of competent abilities and loyal conversation’ were to be accepted as ministers of Scotland’s Church.⁹⁴ Church and State were to strain every nerve to bring an end to the Covenanting period’s violence.

The General Assembly’s deliberations took the desired course and the ‘Revolution Settlement’ was achieved: the Church in its Presbyterian form became the recognized National Church. The National Covenants, which had been the enthusiastic bond of the Scottish nation at first, and later watchwords of rebellion, were simply avoided by both the Church and the State. The Revolution Church was founded in compromise. The sixty Presbyterian ministers who had been deposed at the ‘Restoration’ of Episcopacy in 1661 and who had managed to outlive the period of persecution were now less forceful in demanding the Divine Right of presbytery and that the monarchy (civil magistrate) embrace Scotland’s Covenants.⁹⁵ Their tolerant mindset would also set the tone for the newly established Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Although the monarchy and the politicians of the period ignored the Covenants, they were not forgotten by all in the Church. The Revolution Settlement may have announced the passing of the Covenanting period but a new era had dawned.

⁹³ *Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1638-1842*, (Edinburgh: 1843), 222.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁹⁵ A. Ian Dunlop, *William Carstares and the Kirk by Law Established* (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1967), 78-80.

The absence of the Covenants from the Revolution Settlement was a source of dismay to many Presbyterians. Alexander Shields, William Boyd and Thomas Lining, leaders of the 'United Societies'⁹⁶ prior to Presbyterianism's re-establishment, were admitted to the newly 'established' Church, but made clear their reservations at the omission of the Covenants.⁹⁷ Those Presbyterians who remained outside the Church of Scotland associated with the Cameronians, 'Hillman' or 'Societies,' and insisted that there could be no pure Church without the re-implementation of the Covenants.⁹⁸ Although a minority, the 'Societies' sought to preserve an unbroken relationship with the pre-Revolution period.⁹⁹ The 'Societies' would continue the Covenanting legacy under the leadership of layman Robert Hamilton until John McMillan (1669-1753) became minister to the 'Societies'. In 1712, as a response to the 1707 union of parliaments, the Oath of Abjuration and the restoration of patronage, the 'Societies' renewed the Covenants.¹⁰⁰ According to Hutchison, 'approbation of [Covenant renewal] was required by all who joined the Societies'.¹⁰¹ From 1712-1750, the 'Societies' initiated multiple fasts which lamented the decline of the covenanted relationship

⁹⁶ The 'United Societies' was an organised gathering of covenanters in the southwest of Scotland. They emerged during the government's harshest suppression of Presbyterianism in 1680s in order to hear Presbyterian field preaching, and celebrate the Lord's Supper. Often called the 'Society people,' 'Cameronians,' or 'Hillmen,' they continued to protest against governmental persecution, fellow Presbyterians who accepted the government's Indulgences and Episcopacy. They also publically objected to what they believed was an uncovenanted monarchy. David Lachman, 'United Societies' in Nigel de S. Cameron, ed., *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

⁹⁷ Hector MacPherson, 'Alexander Shields, 1660-1700', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 3 (1929): 57-58. M'Kerrow, *History*, 3-5., indicated that the three Society ministers submitted their protest to the General Assembly. It was judged too harsh of a statement to be admitted into the proceedings. It seems fair to assume that their statement resonated with covenant ideology and the desire to reinstate the National Covenants.

⁹⁸ Matthew Hutchison, *Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland: 1680-1876* (Paisley: J. and R. Parlane, 1893), 118-123. William McMillan, 'The Covenanters after the Revolution of 1688', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 10 (1950): demonstrated that the Societies were not as united as Hutchison seemed to indicate. There were various splinter groups he listed as the 'Russelites,' 'Gibbites,' 'Howdenites,' 'Harlites' and the 'Cootmor folk.' All vociferously maintained an adherence to the National Covenants and appeared to be antagonistic in their intemperate language towards the Established Church and monarchy.

⁹⁹ John Mackmillan, *Secession from the Revolution Church* ([Glasgow?]: 1708). Found in Kerr, *Covenant and Covenanters*, 434-442.

¹⁰⁰ *National Covenant, and Solemn League...Renewed at Douglas...1712*, ([Edinburgh?]: 1712), 5.

¹⁰¹ Hutchison, *R.P.History*, 166, 212.

Scotland had with God.¹⁰² They also proclaimed Scotland's need to re-embrace 'her Covenant engagements with God'.¹⁰³ From 1706 McMillan would lead the remaining 'Society' adherents until he was joined by Thomas Nairn (1680-1764) in 1743 to form what became the Reformed Presbytery.

Others, more moderate in their views and loyal to the national Church, also continued to recall and yearn for a renewal of the Church on a covenanted basis. A commissioner to the 1690 General Assembly after the Revolution, David Williamson's (d.1706) sermon opened the General Assembly of 1703. He declared:

Against all the points of Popery, and for maintaining the purity of Doctrine, Worship, the Discipline and Government of this Church, by Kirk-Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, and General Assemblies, which we received as ingraft in our Reformation from Popery, this Land was sworn to by Covenant. Some will say may ye not quite it? It would say something if all Parties concerned gave consent, but it's reckoned, God is our Party with whom this Nation covenanted, once, again, and a third time, and who dare bid him consent. Mistake me not, as if I were not pressing the taking or renewing the Covenants, altho' I own the binding virtue of it: It's a Business of such moment, as would take no small time to dispose a Nation for it; I fear hypocrisie in taking, and unfaithfulness in keeping it, has been lying at many Folks Door: Some will mock at all these Provocations, but if the Lord live, their Bands shall be made strong, if they repent not. There may be some living that will see this, I have seen something like it in my time, for the Word of the Lord will not fall to the ground.¹⁰⁴

David Stevenson (d.1728), a layman from the 'parish of Air,' perhaps exemplified the testimony of many a devout Presbyterian at the Revolution Settlement. In the context of discussing his own personal covenants with God and Scotland's 'binding obligations' to the national Covenants he also explained why he joined the establishment Church.

...that it was my unquestionable Duty, to join in Communion with the Church of Scotland, tho' our Covenants were not renewed, seeing she had all the essentials of a true Church, her Doctrine pure and uncorrupt, her Government, Discipline and Worship, according to the Word of GOD, and the Sacraments Administrated according to the pattern shewn in the Mount, seeing she had appointed a National Fast, as the Jews [had done]...to bewail all the Defections that all Ranks had been guilty of under Prelacy; so that in a national Way, High and Low, had occasion to Condemn themselves, for trampling God's Holy Laws, yea for despising the Oath and breaking the Covenant, after we had lifted up our Hand to the Most

¹⁰² Robinson, 'Immigrant Covenanters', 95.

¹⁰³ United Societies, *The Protestation and Testimony of the United Societies...Against the Sinful Incorporating Union...* ([Edinburgh?]: 1707).

¹⁰⁴ David Williamson, *A Sermon...At the Opening of the General Assembly...* (Edinburgh: Andrew Anderson, 1703), 13.

High. As such like considerations as these, clear'd up my Way in joining in Communion with this Church since the Revolution...¹⁰⁵

Robert Wodrow's (1679-1734) collected *Correspondence* also portrayed the covenanting spirit at work in the early eighteenth century. However, he would do so in a moderate and cautious manner. Wodrow, particularly in the context of the Oath of Abjuration, the union of parliaments, and the various calls for national fasts by the civil magistrates, depicted the existence of the constant disputations over the renewal of Scotland's Covenants as almost commonplace within the Church's higher courts. He indicated that there were many, including proposals from several Synods, who either favoured discussion regarding the renewal of the Covenant or who had desired a formal subscription to them within the national Church.¹⁰⁶ The disputes were noted to be quelled by influential and politically-savvy landholding commissioners.¹⁰⁷ Wodrow seemingly remained aloof in his judgment of the Covenants being renewed or included in any formula for subscription. He remained opposed to the 'Dissenters' or Cameronians because they refused to unite with the Church.¹⁰⁸ It is clear from Wodrow that the Cameronians were not the only ones who pressured the Church of Scotland over the issue of the binding obligations of the Covenants. Wodrow proved to be sympathetic to a national covenanting ideal, without implicitly or explicitly precluding the renewal of the Covenants. He favoured the General Assembly's inclusion of covenanting language in the 'Act for a Solemn National Fast and Humiliation' in 1701.¹⁰⁹ He likewise firmly concurred with James Hog, who pressed the need to redress Scotland's covenanted status, yet denounced the radical position of disunity the 'dissenters' embraced.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ John Stevenson, *A Rare Soul Strengthening and Comforting Cordial...* (Glasgow: printed by James Duncan, 1729), 46-47.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas M'Crie, ed., *The Correspondence of the Rev. Robert Wodrow*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Wodrow Society, 1842-1843), I.6, 148, III.200, 256.

¹⁰⁷ Namely, Lord Grange and Col. Erskine. *Ibid.*, III.256, I.146-148.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, I.46, 63-64, 84, III.227.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, I.147-148. *Acts of the General Assembly*, 290-291.

¹¹⁰ M'Crie, ed., *Correspondence*, Vol. I, I.46.

Thomas Boston (1676-1732) maintained a firm commitment to the covenant idea. Boston presents a view of Scotland's Covenants that was probably shared by many in the Post-Revolution Church. Boston, himself plagued by 'McMillan' and the 'dissenters,' argued against the schismatic nature of the 'Societies' adherents who remained outside the national Church.¹¹¹ Boston equated Scotland's covenanted status with that of Israel. However, he valued the spirit of the national Covenants more than the public acknowledgment of their obligations by magistrate or parliament.¹¹² Boston stated in a treatise on the Divine-human covenant relationship:

Take heed of forgetting the covenant of your God. When men lose the sense of the bond of the covenant, they cannot long forbear the breaking of it. We see this in Adam our father, and we may see it daily in mens personal covenants, and the national covenants these lands are under the bonds of. The impression of them is worn off, and so the duties of them are cast behind mens backs. No wonder that this is the sin of the land, and of particular persons, seeing we are all children of the great covenant transgressor Adam.¹¹³

Clearly, Boston acknowledged both the individual covenant relationship as well as the corporate nature of Scotland's covenanted relationship with God. He may also be seen as sympathetic toward the renewal of the Covenants and their abiding validity. This, however, must not be done at the expense of making his parishioners aware of their spiritual needs of being in covenant with God. Both A.T.B. McGowan and Philip Graham Ryken have pointed out that Boston's practical theology, including his *Fourfold State*, was firmly set within the framework of confessional federal theology.¹¹⁴

Discussions over the union of parliaments in 1707 caused much anxiety among Presbyterians. Jeffery Stephen has indicated that the negotiations over an incorporating union of parliaments sparked a renewed interest in using the Covenants. He demonstrated that 'a consistent theme of parish addresses to parliament was that no union should be

¹¹¹ George Morrison, ed., *Memoirs of the Life, Time, and Writings of the Reverend and Learned Thomas Boston* (Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1899), 214-220.

¹¹² Thomas Boston, *The Evil and Danger of Schism. A Sermon, by the Late Learned and Pious Mr. Thomas Boston*, Third ed. (Edinburgh: 1756), 20ff.

¹¹³ Thomas Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Works...* (Edinburgh: J. Reid, 1772), 93.

¹¹⁴ McGowan, *Boston*, 208-209, Ryken, *Fourfold State*, 21-28.

entered into that was inconsistent with the covenants'.¹¹⁵ Presbyterians feared that a parliamentary union would shift power completely to England and thus threaten Scotland's Revolution Settlement.¹¹⁶ Even worse, they feared that English bishops would wield power over their (Presbyterian) establishment. Presbyterians were unsure how the goal of the Solemn League and Covenant to 'Reform England' could be advanced if Scotland united with a government directly aligned with Episcopacy.¹¹⁷ Any adherence to the Covenants disallowed Scotland's national Church to be subjected to this sort of rule. However, Stephen mistakenly maintained that this was the view of the 'Cameronians', quoting a well-known Edinburgh Church of Scotland minister, James Webster (1659-1720).¹¹⁸ Webster may have been an old-style covenanter who opposed Episcopacy, but he was not a Cameronian. Stephen also argued that the use of the Covenants 'suited' the debate against the union of parliaments.¹¹⁹ This was not simply a renewed interest in Scotland's Covenants. It was a debate that forced Scots Presbyterians to rethink the implications of their covenantal obligations. Daniel Defoe (c.1661-1731), in the midst of disputations over the union of parliaments, acknowledged that for Scotland 'the Covenant is binding to Posterity, And I add, that for argument sake, I'll grant; whether I believe it or no, it has all that Obligation they allege, let that be what it will—signifying thereby, they do reckon greater Obligations than really are in the Covenant, and this I call eating sowre grapes.'¹²⁰ Presbyterians, not just the radical Cameronians, valued Scotland's Covenants but were unsure how they would be interpreted in the new political alignment with England's parliament.¹²¹

¹¹⁵ Jeffrey Stephen, 'The Kirk and the Union, 1706-07: A Reappraisal', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 31 (2002): 75.

¹¹⁶ Dunlop, *Carstares*, 115.

¹¹⁷ James Webster, *Lawful Prejudices against an Incorporating Union with England...And the Danger Flowing from It to the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: 1707), 5-6.

¹¹⁸ Stephen, 'Kirk and Union': 76.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Daniel Defoe, *A Short View of the Present State of the Protestant Religion in Britain...* (1707), 17. Defoe, known mostly as a novelist, was an English government informant during the years surrounding the unification process. The intention of his writings during this period entailed the attempt to soften the tensions over the idea of a London-based parliament.

¹²¹ This is seen in *Vindication of Ministers and Ruling Elders...Who Have Refused the Oath of Abjuration...Part I*, ([Edinburgh?]: 1713).

The Abjuration Oath sparked controversy in the national Church in 1711. The person taking the oath disclaimed the Stuart line of the ‘Pretender,’ and promised to support the succession of a Protestant monarchy. The condition of the Oath was that the monarch should belong to the Church of England. This caused many to question the Oath’s compatibility with Scotland’s Covenants.¹²² In an essay to the ‘Dunblane’ Presbytery denouncing the Oath of Abjuration, a layman named Hugh Clark (d.1724), argued that submission to the Oath would nullify ‘our Sacred Covenants, for the defence of Religion and Liberty,’ rendering them ‘broken and made of none Effect’. Clark also indicated that a parish had ‘formally Subscribed’, ‘in the presence of its Eldership’, ‘to adhere to the National and Solemn League and Covenant’ sometime after the Revolution Settlement.¹²³ Numerous pamphlets portrayed the duplicitous nature of any Presbyterian minister taking such an oath in light of the nation’s covenanted status. Other pamphlets argued that Presbyterian ministers ought to take the Oath by de-emphasizing or denouncing any alleged inconsistencies it had with the Covenants.¹²⁴ In 1718, an essay written by a ‘Lover of Peace and Truth, G.C.’ argued that Scotland’s acceptance of the Act of Union and its ministers’ submission to the Oath of Abjuration incited God’s wrath upon Scotland. It also articulated a Scottish nationalism when it referred to the obligations attached to the Covenants. The author states:

‘With Reference to the Union, whatever we suffer by it we should always own and avow the Obligation of our solemn Covenants, for that is the prior, the more sacred the scriptural, and by consequence the far more preferable Obligation...so long as this Land remains to be a Nation inhabited by Scots-Men, these Covenants will always remain binding upon the native inhabitants thereof, hence that GOD doth Require the Contents of them to be performed and

¹²² Many adhered to the Oath, but with reservations. This included William Carstares. R.H. Story, *William Carstares: A Character and Career of the Revolutionary Epoch (1649-1715)* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1874), 333.

¹²³ Hugh Clark, *Oath of Abjuration Displayed...Its Inconsistency with Presbyterian Principles and Covenants...* ([Edinburgh?]: 1712), 7-9.

¹²⁴ *Letter Concerning the True State of the Question between Non-Jurant and Jurant Ministers of the Church of Scotland*, (Edinburgh: [1718?]), *Oath of Abjuration, Considered in a Letter...* ([Edinburgh]: 1712), *Vindication-Part I, A Vindication of the Ministers and Ruling Elders in the Church of Scotland, Part II*, ([Edinburgh?]: 1713), *White Swan with Black Feet*, ([Edinburgh?]: 1713). The most complete collection of these pamphlets which detail both sides of the ecclesiastical debate are found in the National Library of Scotland, Pamphlets, 1.402(1-23). Nearly all of the pamphlets in this collection deal with the Oath of Abjuration’s inconsistencies with Scotland’s Covenants.

fulfilled by us, and will no less require it of our Posterity, in all Ages to come.... Scotland is not likely to thrive in Civil or prosper in Sacred Concerns, as in times past formerly it hath, till the horrid Breaches and Ignominious Abuses of these honourable Covenants, be publicly and particularly acknowledged and mourned for by all Ranks, till they be yet again solemnly renewed, till we be made to own them as our greatest Dignity and Glory...¹²⁵

For this author national identity corresponded with adherence to the Covenants. Piety and Scottish nationalism resonated in covenantal terms. This is also seen in an essay by the former 'Societies' leader Thomas Linning who, in 1709, denounced John McMillan (newly recognised leader of the 'Societies') for being divisive in ecclesiastical matters. He also concluded that 'a detestable neutrality and indifferency...supported by Sinful Politicks' and the schism encouraged by McMillan and his following 'are equally abjur'd by our Covenants.' Linning continued:

I am a Well-wisher to the Covenanted Work of Reformation, and shall not cease (Grace assisting) to Weep in Secret for a broken and torn Church; And to Shew you that I am impartial, I shall tell you that I abhor your Practice that's destructive of the Prosperity of the Mother Church (hitherto pitied and not entirely forsaken by her only Lord and Head Christ Jesus) so I find myself obliged to declare my great Grief for, and to give my Testimony against some Sinful steps of Defection carried on by some Unfaithful Persons, undeservedly of too great Influence among us, and reclaim'd against by an honest part of the Ministry we will not give over Pleading, with such, yet we will still adhere to the Church of *Scotland*, unless (which our Covenanted God forbid) Christ shall give her a Bill of Divorcement...so we resolve (thro' grace) to contend zealously against all (of whatever denomination) who would forsake the good Old Way, and the known Principles of the Church of *Scotland*.¹²⁶

Alexander Hamilton (1663-1738), minister in Airth and later in Stirling, composed *A Short Catechism Concerning the Three Special Divine Covenants, and Two Gospel Sacraments* (1714) for those of 'Weaker Capacity'. Intended as a summary of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Hamilton portrayed Scotland's Covenants in equal terms with biblical Israel's national covenant. Moreover, he described 'covenanting in both a national sense and personal sense as 'Solemn Avouching the Lord to be their God, and themselves to be his People, by a *Covenant of Free Grace*, and Binding of their Soul to him, and unto all Duties of Holiness and Righteousness, and that under the Conduct of his Covenanted Grace

¹²⁵ G.C., *Scotland's Present Circumstances, and the Present Duty of Private Christians....* (Edinburgh: Printed for Samuel Arnot, 1718), 63-64.

¹²⁶ Thomas Linning, *A Letter from a Friend to Mr. John Mackmillan...* ([Edinburgh?]: [1709?]), 16.

allenarly.¹²⁷ In a no less direct fashion Ebenezer Erskine (1680-1754) embraced a covenantal view which encompassed both nation and individual. In a sermon preached at Edinburgh in 1720, he bemoaned the 'Breach of the National Covenant' and identified Scotland with biblical 'Zion'. He viewed Scotland's allegiance to its covenanted relationship with God in the early eighteenth century as 'a Lukewarmness of our Spirits about the Way and Work of God.' He then concluded: 'And I find that a changing of the Ordinances [Scotland's Covenants], and a Breaking of the Everlasting Covenant, go together in Scripture, Isai.xxiv.5.'¹²⁸ The Covenants had remained deeply ingrained in the Scottish consciousness.

As late as 1744, the noted Church of Scotland minister John Willison (1680-1750) stated: 'We wish [the Revolution Settlement General Assembly] had done more to retrieve the honour of these broken and burnt Covenants, by openly asserting the Lawfulness and Obligation of them. And applying to the Civil Powers for their Concurrence to renew them, or rather of the one made up of both, with Accommodation to their Times and Circumstances.'¹²⁹ David Mullan has also shown how in the 1720s John Glas (1695-1773) took exception to the venerating of Scotland's Covenants when many others in the Church of Scotland continued to do so.¹³⁰ But evidence of the continued reverence to the Covenants' obligations upon Scotland was most demonstrably seen in the Associate Presbytery's 'secession' from the national Church in 1733.¹³¹ In reference to the Revolution Settlement, the Secession ministers claimed:

¹²⁷ Alexander Hamilton, *A Short Catechism, Concerning the Three Special Divine Covenants...* (Edinburgh: John Moncur, 1714), 17. Hamilton was a supporter of the *Marrow* but did not join in the Representation of it before the General Assembly's investigative Committee or the Secession according to Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*, 286.

¹²⁸ Ebenezer Erskine, *Groans of Believers under Their Burdens...Preached In...1720* (Edinburgh: 1722), 30-39.

¹²⁹ John Willison, *A Fair and Impartial Testimony...* (Edinburgh: T.Lumsden and J.Robertson, 1744), 23-24.

¹³⁰ David G. Mullan, 'The Royal Law of Liberty: A Reassessment of the Early Career of John Glass', *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* 6 (1999): 233-262.

¹³¹ *Act, Declaration and Testimony for the Doctrine, Worship, Discipline and Government of the Church of Scotland...* (Edinburgh: Lumsden and Robertson, 1737).

It was alledged, That the Land was then no way ripe to return by solemn national Covenanting unto the Lord; and that it was not a *proper Time* and '*Season*' to be *too particular* in mentioning our publick national Sins, and in condemning the gross Defections and heinous Backslidings of the former Period, or in justifying the Wrestlings and Contendings for the covenanted Testimony of the Church of Scotland...But, in *waiting* for a *proper Time* and *Season*, we came to lose the *Season* and *Opportunity* altogether.'¹³²

In 1743 these Seceders renewed the Covenants. By 1744 they robustly affirmed:

Agreeably to Scripture-Precepts and Patterns, of perpetual Obligation and Use, the Reformation of Religion in *Scotland* hath, through the several Periods thereof, been carried on in a Way of *Covenanting*; wherein also the Kingdoms of Scotland, England and Ireland, did concur, *Anno 1643*...The *Associate Presbytery*, being led out, in the Course of Sovereign and holy Providence, to essay the Revival of Reformation, have judged it their Duty to essay, for this purpose, the Revival of *Covenanting*.

What followed this statement was an overture for the 'Renovation of our Solemn Covenants'

but 'in a way and manner agreeable to [the] our present situation'.¹³³ The national

covenanting ideal had never disappeared in Scotland. The public discussion of Scotland's covenantal obligations, in many ministers' minds, was tabled at the Revolution until a later date. The omission of the Covenants at the Revolution Settlement was thought only to neglect a judicial assertion of them but not the actual obligations upon Scotland.¹³⁴

Scotland's Covenants may have lain dormant since the Revolution Settlement; but the ideal of an entire nation in covenant with God never vanished. Rather, many Presbyterians hoped and expected that Scotland would one day again renew its sacred Covenants. Gone were many of the extreme practices of the seventeenth-century Covenanting period, such as secretive field conventicles and open hostility toward the uncovenanted monarchy. The powerful ideas contained within the Covenants, nascent within the federal theology of the day, had become deeply ingrained in Post-Revolution Presbyterian thought. They may not have been publicly affirmed by an official government decree, but Presbyterians would continue to embrace them as vital to the preservation of their nation's spirituality.

¹³² *Testimony to the Doctrine, Worship, Government and Discipline of the Church of Scotland...* (Edinburgh: Thomas Lumsden and John Robertson, 1734), 35-36.

¹³³ *Act of the Associate Presbytery, for Renewing the National Covenant of Scotland, and the Solemn League and Covenant*, (Edinburgh: T.W. and T.Ruddimans, 1744), 81.

¹³⁴ William Wilson, *A Defence of the Reformation-Principles of the Church of Scotland...* (Edinburgh: T. Lumsden and J. Robertson, 1739), 271.

From the time of the Revolution Settlement, Scotland continued to be heavily influenced by the covenant idea. Eighteenth-century piety, moreover, was dependent upon the seventeenth-century popularization of federal theology. In the Post-Revolution period there was also a voracious demand for printed sermons and compilations of lectures or sermons on various themes. Many of these elaborate on the covenant idea. Not only were the great seventeenth-century writers such as the Gillespies, Rutherford, Durham, and Guthrie in demand for most of the eighteenth century, but also the sermons of contemporary and lesser-known parish ministers were regularly published in pamphlet form.

In 1710, the General Assembly's 'Act for Preserving Purity of Doctrine' further solidified the doctrinal pre-eminence of the federal system outlined in the *Westminster Confession*.¹³⁵ The convulsions of the *Marrow* controversy, which involved the interpretation and practical application of federal theology, along with the John Simpson (1667-1740) case, demonstrated the ardent commitment of the Post-Revolution Church of Scotland to the federal system.¹³⁶ Federal theology in its confessional expression and in its manifold devotional publications was to establish a pattern for piety that enabled the covenant idea to flourish. This linking of federal theology to popular piety contributed to the continued belief that Scotland was covenanted with God. Presbyterian ministers strove to communicate a sense of the covenantal obligations to their parishioners. This enabled them to emphasize the obligations of conversion and holiness in highly relational and intimate language. They did this with manifold biblical illustrations which drove home the notion that Scotland's relationship with God was analogous, if not identical, to biblical Israel.

¹³⁵ *Acts of the General Assembly*, 446-447.

¹³⁶ Thomas M'Crie, *The Story of the Church* (London: Blackie & Son, 1875), 452-453, William J. U. Philip, 'The Marrow and the Dry Bones. Ossified Orthodoxy and the Battle for the Gospel in Eighteenth-Century Scottish Calvinism', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 15 (1997). An important study on the controversy is Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*. John Simpson, professor of Divinity at Glasgow, was charged on two separate occasions for teaching a subtle Socinianism and Arianism. He was acquitted in the hearing before the General Assembly. In the second case against him, the courts rendered his teaching to be out of line with the *Westminster Confession*.

The idea of a nation ‘in Covenant’ with God thus became deeply rooted in Scotland’s national consciousness and pervasive to the climate of piety. The influence of the national Covenants was visible in the anxiety displayed by Presbyterians in their constant lamentation over Scotland’s backsliding condition, the vociferous pleas for revival of a spiritual religion, aspirations of seeing a pure Church manifested, and for the preservation of the Presbyterian form of government. Many continued to believe that Scotland’s Covenants maintained their obligations upon posterity. They viewed the Covenants as a standard for and a confirmation of pure doctrine and a pure Church. Through federal theology, ministers articulated holiness from their pulpits both as a corporate and as an individual imperative. That an omnipotent and immutable God forged a relationship with the Scottish people in a tangible illustration of Divine love proved to be a potent catalyst for piety. The covenant idea assured people that God was concerned with their lives. This assurance, along with the potency of the ‘Reformation of Religion’ motif, would nurture for many a deep-rooted desire for the revival of the covenanted past. In the early decades of the eighteenth century the notion that a desiccated religion would revive only at God’s pleasure had a powerful influence among Presbyterian clergy.¹³⁷

The idea of covenant was to serve as a wellspring of piety from which many Presbyterians would later drink as they moved from the covenanting identity of the seventeenth century into the evangelicalism of the eighteenth century. Moreover, Post-Revolution Presbyterianism was imbibed with an urgent sense of fidelity to God—a fidelity that would take shape within a covenantal consciousness. In this sense we should understand the lasting profundity in the words James Guthrie exclaimed prior to his martyrdom in 1661:

¹³⁷ Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 180-182, Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity*, 135.

‘The Covenants, the Covenants shall yet be Scotland's reviving’¹³⁸—a sentiment that would echo loudly throughout the eighteenth century.

¹³⁸ John Howie, *The Scots Worthies* (Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1908), 73,266. This work was comprised from John Howie's (1735-1793) *Biographia Scoticana* in 1775. It was extremely popular in Scotland well into the nineteenth century. Howie did much to revive evangelical ideas associated with the Covenanting period. Guthrie's famous words may be seen sporadically throughout documents on Covenant obligations in the early eighteenth century. It can be seen in the republication of Alexander Shield's defence of *Perpetual Obligation of Our Covenants...Asserted...By...Alexander Shields*, (Edinburgh: 1730).

CHAPTER TWO

LONGINGS FOR REVIVAL: THE LINGERING EFFECTS OF A COVENANTED WAY

Post-Revolution Scotland remained a place saturated with the covenant idea. The federal theology of the *Westminster Confession* provided the basic structure for piety. Memories of the seventeenth-century Covenanters' piety and politics were never wholly neglected by the Post-Revolution Church; rather, lingering notions of Scotland's unique status as a Christian nation in need of revival persisted among evangelicals. The world of the Bible and the world of Scotland were thought to be akin. G.D. Henderson remarked that since the period of the Reformation 'the Bible soaked itself into the thinking and vocabulary and habits of all classes'.¹ The *First Book of Discipline* (1560), later reinforced by the *Second Book of Discipline* (1578), left an indelible mark on education in Scotland. The Reformers envisioned that every parishioner should read the Bible in order to promote the ideals of a godly, covenanted nation.² The 'Act of Settling of Schools' (1696), at least in principle, ensured this vision would continue and kept the General Assembly involved in shaping the curriculum.³ The parish education system used the Bible as a textbook.⁴ A diet of Bible reading also was commended in the *Westminster Confession* and *Directory for Publick Worship* to be used by families for regular devotional exercises. The English journalist Daniel Defoe remarked of Scotland's Kirk in 1707: 'In a whole church full of people, not one shall be seen without a Bible...if you shut your eyes when the minister names any text of Scripture, you shall hear a little rustling noise over the whole place, made by turning the

¹ G. D. Henderson, *The Claims of the Church of Scotland* (Warrick: Hodder, 1951), 13.

² Rosiland Mitchison, *Social Life in Scotland* (London: B.T. Batesford, 1978), 41-ff.

³ T.M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation: 1700-2000* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 91-92, Lynch, *Scotland*, 259.

⁴ G. D. Henderson, *The Scottish Ruling Elder* (London: James Clarke and Company, 1935), 155-156.

leaves of the Bible.’⁵ Indeed, if the ‘Qualification of covenanters and those that swear the Lord of Hosts...are a People that speak the [‘Scripture’] Language of Canaan...and...are such who Prize the Word of God’ and apply it in every area of life,⁶ then early eighteenth-century Scotland had such people. This was only natural, given the prominence which the Scottish Reformed tradition gave to the preached Word of God.⁷

The Scottish pulpit was, of course, vital for sustaining and reviving piety in individuals as well as the nation. Parish life gave direction to Scotland’s social life and the pulpit directly influenced public perceptions on matters of religion and politics.⁸ Preaching was ‘discursive rather than disputational’.⁹ Sermons by popular evangelicals were frequently designed around weighty Old Testament passages, while the New Testament was used primarily for illustrating the Old Testament. Confronted with sermons from the Old Testament week after week, it is not surprising that many parishioners assimilated biblical conceptions of the covenant relationship between God and his people. Sermons not only provided spiritual encouragement to individuals but also affirmed the unfolding of God’s plan for the Scottish people. The sermon’s significance, both in oral and written form, in the Post-Revolution period cannot be overstated. Sermons provide an intelligible portrait of the prevailing theology of the time since more formalised works of dogmatic theology were rarely produced in eighteenth-century Scotland. The need for dogmatic theologies diminished after the Westminster Assembly had codified Presbyterian orthodoxy for the Scottish Church.¹⁰

⁵ Daniel Defoe, *Memoirs of the Church of Scotland* (Perth: J. Dewar, 1846), 355.

⁶ Alexander Moncrieff, *The Duty of National Covenanting Explained* (Edinburgh: David Duncan, 1747), 9-10.

⁷ Several highlight this significance within Scottish preaching: Blaikie, *Preachers of Scotland*, Burleigh, *Church History*, Gordon Donaldson, *The Faith of the Scots* (B.T. Batesford Ltd., 1990), MacLeod, *Scottish Theology*, William M. Taylor, *The Scottish Pulpit: From the Reformation to the Present Day* (London: Charles Burnet & Company, 1887), Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, Walker, *Theology and Theologians*.

⁸ John Scott, *The Pastor’s Power, and the People’s Obedience...Preached before the Synod of Dumfries* (Edinburgh: 1731). Scott’s (1697-1770) sermon is a good example of how ministers were expected to be the leaders of their parish and communities.

⁹ P.G. Ryken, ‘Scottish Reformed Scholasticism’, in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl Trueman and R.S.Clark (London: Paternoster, 1999).

¹⁰ Ibid.

Sermons of popular eighteenth-century evangelical preachers often were published in numerous editions.¹¹ Devotional theology was promulgated through published sermons by popular evangelical ministers.¹²

Covenantal Sermon Structure

Few works were published as instructional guides for preaching in the eighteenth century. The standards for preaching in Post-Revolution Scotland remained anchored in the prescribed structure offered by the *Westminster Directory*, while the *Confession's* theology undergirded the theology of salvation and piety. One of the *Directory's* most substantial sections was its instruction on preaching the Bible. The 1705 statement of the General Assembly 'seriously recommend[ed] to all ministers and others within this National church the due observation of the Directory for the Public Worship of God'.¹³ However, as Matheson has pointed out, 'formal training in sermon composition was to a large extent unrecognized in early 18th-century Scotland...'¹⁴ Yet, a number of sermons and lengthier discourses describing the character of the minister and the duties required of him were published. Thomas Blackwell's (1701-1757) *Methodus Evangelica...A Modest Essay Upon the True Scriptural-Rational Way of Preaching the Gospel* is an exhaustive statement on ministry and preaching, which emphasizes the necessity of preaching salvation in covenantal language. 'When a Minister', wrote Blackwell, 'finds his Congregation to be a most Ignorant and Rude People, then 'tis plain, that the two grand Doctrines of the Law and Gospel, to wit, the Covenant of Works, and of Grace, should spend a great many sermons, in opening of them up...'¹⁵ Other treatises, while in the form of Presbytery, Synod, and Assembly admonitions, dealt considerably with the minister's role in the pulpit. They

¹¹ Ann Matheson, *Theories of Rhetoric in the 18th-Century Scottish Sermon* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 27-33.

¹² Philip, *Devotional Literature*.

¹³ Act X, *Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland: 1638-1842*, (Edinburgh: 1843), 397.

¹⁴ Matheson, *Theories of Rhetoric*, 54.

¹⁵ Thomas Blackwell, *Methodus Evangelica* (London: 1712), 48.

emphasized that a minister's primary task was to present God's redemptive dealings within the federal framework of doctrine in a personal and easily understood manner.¹⁶

Sermons structured around the federal framework were rigorously evangelical and emphasized personal salvation. Thomas Boston's *Fourfold State* was a compendium of sermons categorically arranged according to the historic methodology, *status quadruplex*,¹⁷ or the four states of innocence, nature, grace, and eternity. *The Fourfold State* uniquely demonstrates a covenantal paradigm *par excellence*, which much evangelical preaching sought to emulate in the eighteenth century.¹⁸ Ryken has shown that *The Fourfold State*'s popularity in Scotland lasted through the nineteenth century, and also indicated its remarkable influence in communicating the covenant schema.¹⁹ Demanding the predominance of federal theology for preaching can be illustrated in other ministers' sermons. James Fisher (1697-1775), prior to the 1733 Secession, preached on the duty of ministers to use the 'covenant' method of communicating the 'gospel' message at a service of ordination:

We are to preach, that there was Love in the Heart of God from Eternity, towards a Company of Adam's Family, whom he foresaw, that, with the rest of mankind, they would plunge themselves into a State of Sin...Herein is Love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us. That this amazing Love, which is essential to God, might be vented to Mankind-sinners...²⁰

Gabriel Wilson (1679-1750) exhorted ministers on their duty to preach the covenant as the message of salvation. In calling ministers 'Nurses of Souls' and 'to which the Keys of the

¹⁶ John Anderson, *Sermon Preach'd in the Church of Air...At the Opening of Synod...April 1712* (Glasgow: [1712?]), Peter Rae, *Gospel Minister's Christ Ambassadors...A Sermon Preached at the Provincial Synod of Dumfries* (Edinburgh: Fleming and Company, 1733), Scott, *Pastor's Power*, David Sommervail, *Preaching of Self Exploded, and the Preaching of Christ Explained and Enforced* (Glasgow: John Bryce, 1776), William Willis, *Ministerial Faithfulness Recommended...In the Admission of Young Men to the Holy Ministry...Sermon Preached at the Associate Synod, April 24th, 1798* (Glasgow: M. Ogle-J. Ogle, 1798).

¹⁷ This method of systematization derives from Augustine of Hippo (354-430), and can be seen in subsequent Medieval and Reformed theology. Ryken, *Fourfold State*, 67ff.

¹⁸ Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State* Thirteenth ed. (Edinburgh: John Wood, 1763).

¹⁹ Ryken, *Fourfold State*, 82-83, 296-ff. Ryken indicated that 'covenant theology both penetrates and overlays the Fourfold State' but does not form the structure of the fourfold state. This of course is the genius of Boston's theological organisation of his preaching and systematization of his theological line of thought.

²⁰ James Fisher, *Christ Jesus the Lord Considered as the Inexhaustible Matter of Gospel-Preaching...* (Edinburgh: David Duncan, 1740), 17-18.

Kingdom of Heaven are committed to their Trust', they 'must cast open Heaven's Door of free Grace, and invite all without Distinction "or Exception"...to compel People to come in; to come in to Christ...to come in to God's Family, to God's Covenant as the Way of Believing'.²¹ Alexander Hamilton insisted that, 'the word Gospel, denotes the Covenant of Grace...it moreover denotes the sincere and faithful preaching of the Covenant of Grace and Doctrine thereof, with other Ministerial labours in the work of the Gospel.'²² John Willison, the influential Church of Scotland evangelical, also listed as a qualification for pastoral ministry the ability to unfold the biblical and theological structure of the covenant of grace.²³

With the exception of Thomas Halyburton (1674-1712) university-based theologians contributed little to Scotland's devotional piety. Even the influential theologian Thomas Boston was, in the words of Philip Ryken, 'never anything except a preacher'.²⁴ The same can be said for John Spalding (1631-1699), James Hog (1658?-1734) John Willison (1680-1750), or the popular Secession Church ministers Alexander Moncrieff (1695-1761), Ebenezer Erskine (1680-1754), Ralph Erskine (1685-1752), Adam Gib (1714-1788) and John Brown of Haddington (1722-1787); all of whom had many of their sermons continually republished through the century.²⁵ Consequently, T.F. Torrance appropriately remarked that 'evangelical and pastoral concern gave rise to significant works concerned not so much with systematic theology, as with practical and devotional theology...'²⁶ Certainly many eighteenth-century Scottish preachers developed systematic theologies of their own, but theology largely became public through the publication of sermons or a compendium of

²¹ Gabriel Wilson, *The Trust. A Sermon at the Opening of the Provincial Synod of Mers and Teviotdale...1721* (Edinburgh: 1723), 86-87. A close friend of Thomas Boston, Wilson was a proponent of the Marrow's theology. He is a notable figure in becoming one of the early Independents or Congregational ministers in the mid-1730s.

²² Hamilton, *Catechism*, 25-25.

²³ John Willison, *The Church's Danger, and the Minister's Duty Declared...Preach'd at the Opening of the Synod of Angus and Mearns* (Edinburgh: T. Lumisden and J. Robertson, 1733), 8.

²⁴ Ryken, *Fourfold State*, 1.

²⁵ This is not an exhaustive list of eighteenth-century ministers who were theologically erudite. The above mentioned were extensively published in Scotland and contributed to the rich devotional literature, largely in printed sermons, in eighteenth-century Scotland.

²⁶ Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 233-234.

sermons organised into a treatise. Published volumes of sermons, especially those of the Secession ministers, found their way into many Scottish households. One Church of Scotland minister, Gabriel Scot (1760-1799) of the Kirkpatrick-Juxta parishes (Dumfries), complained in 1790: 'The vulgar read almost nothing but books on religious subjects. Many of them are to [sic] fond of controversial divinity; a taste which the Dissenters are very diligent in promoting, and which the few books they are acquainted with, are rather calculated to confirm. To discourage this unhappy propensity, so common through a great part of Scotland, and to recommend books of a more rational and instructive nature, seems an object worthy of a clergyman.'²⁷ The books Scot complained about were mostly bound compilations of sermons. In 1726, Wodrow blamed the proclivity of the 'Marrou people' to 'print and scatter papers and sermons very cheap throu the country' which he also stated 'are popular'.²⁸ As late as 1801, the *Scots Magazine* averred that the 'Peasantry' were characterized by a fondness for 'controversial divinity', which encouraged their 'fanatical spirit' and maintained their 'polemical acuteness', all of which came from 'the same religious books which inflamed the zeal of their forefathers'. The 'Peasantry' also remained aware of many anecdotes from the 'piety of their ancestors'.²⁹ The circulation of such material promoted the covenant idea and encouraged its use within popular piety.

Historical/Covenantal Interpretations of Scotland

Confessional uniformity, or a strong adherence to the *Westminster Confession*, was a hallmark of eighteenth-century Presbyterianism³⁰ and the structure from which practical piety was strongly encouraged among the evangelical-minded. Yet, this uniformity of doctrinal adherence in no way completely stifled theological dialogue. It did, however, minimize extreme divergences. Some notable disputes did arise over interpretations of

²⁷ John Sinclair, ed., *Statistical Account of Scotland*, 21 vols. (Edinburgh: W. Creech, 1791), IV.324.

²⁸ Wodrow, *Analecta*, 360.

²⁹ *Scots Magazine*, vol. LXIII (Edinburgh: 1801), 389-91.

³⁰ Colin Kidd, 'Scotland's Invisible Enlightenment: Subscription and Heterodoxy in the Eighteenth Century Kirk', *Scottish Church History Society* 30 (2000): 28-54.

federal theology. Yet these disputes developed within sphere of *Westminster Confession* Calvinism. Such was the case in the early eighteenth-century controversies surrounding the Auchterarder debate, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity's* orthodoxy³¹ and Professor John Simpson's supposed denial of a covenant of works.³² Thus, Charles Camie appropriately commented that 'to claim that every breathing soul in Scotland from 1700 until 1740 accepted an identical brand of Westminster Confession Calvinism would be to propose a sociological miracle.'³³ The same could be said for the remainder of the century. Aside from subtle differences in the federal system of theology, as a whole, there was unanimity. Inadvertently, such theological debates of the early eighteenth century enabled federal theology to reinforce itself as an evangelical symbol of purity and revival among ministers and parishioners alike. Such was the case among Church of Scotland evangelicals and the Relief Presbytery. But it was particularly pronounced among the Seceders and Reformed Presbyterians. As a result, piety among these two groups was firmly established within the language and theology of covenant. The doctrinal statements by these dissenting Presbyterian bodies concerning the 'purity of doctrine' demonstrated an unabashed desire to preserve federal theology's historically³⁴ pervasive application in Church and State relations, as well as to re-emphasize their confessional and evangelical positions.³⁵ It also sustained notions of individual and corporate revival. This also explains why both groups maintained the covenant idea as central to the formation of their piety and as the symbol of their ecclesiastical heritage.

³¹ See Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*. The importance of these disputes within the context of the eighteenth-century's covenant idea are covered in Chapters 3-4.

³² *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 51, James Webster, *The Case against Mr. John Simpson...* (Glasgow: Donald Govan, 1715), 5-6.

³³ Charles Camie, *Experience and Enlightenment: Socialization for Cultural Change in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), 30.

³⁴ W.D.J. McKay, *An Ecclesiastical Republic: Church Government in the Writings of George Gillespie* (Edinburgh: Paternoster, 1997), 10ff, 34-34.

³⁵ *Act of the Associate Presbytery Concerning the Doctrine of Grace*, (Edinburgh: T.W. and T. Ruddimans, 1744), Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration. and Testimony, for the Whole of Our Covenanted Reformation...* ([Edinburgh?]: 1761).

Federal Theology's Structure

In as much as federal theology was set within the interpretative context of the Bible as the historical record of all Divine and human interaction, Scottish evangelicals understood God as relating entirely through covenants. The continual revelation of covenant in the progress of biblical history was paradigmatic for all subsequent history. Thus, history was seen to begin with God entering into covenant with Adam (humanity). With the original covenant's failure, the subsequent history of both Israel and the Church was viewed within its gradual renovation by means of the 'new' covenant of grace. Hence, all of Christian history became integrated as the history of salvation since it was the unfolding of Divine redemption.

Federal theology presupposes every aspect of God's relationship with humanity to exist within this redemptive-historical framework. It highlighted for most Scottish evangelicals a redemptive history that dated from Israel's theocracy and included Scotland's national Church.

Classic federal theology, as maintained by eighteenth-century evangelicals, understood that God related to humanity entirely by way of covenant: from eternity (*pactum salutis*/covenant of salvation), in creation (*foedus operum*/covenant of works), and in the salvation of his people (*foedus gratiae*/covenant of grace). The *Confession* states, 'The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.'³⁶ All humanity, by virtue of creation, was dependent on God and thereby in a covenant of life with God. Federal theology accordingly summarised the entire human race within the paradigm of the two 'Adams'. The first 'Adam' represented all humanity in covenant with God, under the covenant of works. The 'second Adam', Jesus Christ, was the federal head of all under the covenant of grace.

³⁶ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1646; reprint, 2003), 12.1.

Some were to assert that an intra-Trinitarian covenant existed between the Father and Son, grounded in God's whole being, and that this effected a progressive, redemptive plan. Known as the covenant of redemption, its theological arrangement was more systematic than biblical. The covenant of redemption likely was popularised in Scotland through Samuel Rutherford's *The Covenant of Life Opened* (1655) and David Dickson's *Therapeutic Sacra* (1656). More notably, eighteenth-century Presbyterians embraced the covenant of redemption through David Dickson and James Durham's³⁷ *Sum of Saving Knowledge* (1650), which was traditionally published and bound in Scotland alongside the *Confession*. The covenant of redemption was the eternal pact made between Father and Son for the salvation of the elect.³⁸ In this covenant the Father appointed the Son to be the mediator or 'second Adam', whose life would be given for the salvation of the elect. The Son accepted the commission promising to fulfil the demand of absolute righteousness to the law of God while the Father agreed to give the elect to the Son.³⁹ Thus, before all time and within the very being of God, the covenant plan of redemption had been determined. Most Presbyterians, following Thomas Boston's two-covenant arrangement, were content to maintain that the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace were of the same nature and 'not two distinct covenants'.⁴⁰ However, those who maintained a distinct covenant of redemption agreed with Boston that the covenant of grace did not depend on the believer's effort, but on God's gracious promise.⁴¹ Presumably, during the early eighteenth century the

³⁷ Robert Wodrow attested to the co-authorship of the work by Durham and Dickson in *Analecta*, III.10

³⁸ David Dickson, James Durham, 'The Sum of Saving Knowledge', in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publishers, 2003), 324.

³⁹ John Willison, *Sacramental Catechism: Or, Familiar Instructor for Young Communicants* (Edinburgh: James M'Euen and Company, 1720), 13-17.

⁴⁰ Thomas Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace...* Reprint ed. (Lewes, East Sussex: Focus Christian Trust, 1990), 24.

⁴¹ Hamilton, *Catechism*, 7-8, 15-16, James Hog, *Covenants of Redemption and Grace Displayed...* (Edinburgh: John Moncur, 1707). John Bissett, *Christ the Covenant of the People, Two Sermons* (Edinburgh: William Gray, 1757), 13, Roxburgh, *Gillespie*, 138, Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, iv, 13-17. Also affirming and descriptive of a covenant of redemption is John Brown, *An Help for the Ignorant... An Essay... On the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (Edinburgh: John Gray and Gavin

ecclesiastical courts allowed laxity as to whether a minister construed the covenant arrangement as two-fold or three-fold, since there was no debate over the subject.⁴²

All covenant theologians affirmed that ‘The first covenant made with man’ was the covenant of works. Eternal life was ‘promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience’ to God’s law.⁴³ Thus, the Divine-human relationship began with ‘Adam’ who was the representative or ‘federal head’ for humanity. Adam’s original state, prior to the fall, was one of perfect righteousness before God, or a state of innocence uncorrupted by sin. Adam was promised life and blessedness on the condition of obedience. Adam’s obedience to God’s law was subject to a probationary period. This period was conditioned by God with a positive prescription of law, ‘Do this and live’. The paradisiac image of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil served as the test of obedience, with disobedience to be enforced by a penalty of death. However, grace was not completely absent from the covenant of works. The covenant of works was itself understood as created by a gracious action of God. The promise of life to the first ‘Adam’ came from God’s goodness in creation.

However, the covenant of works was found to be unrealisable. It was broken by Adam’s disobedience to God’s command and thereby rendered ineffective as the means to salvation. Adam’s sin became legally and effectively the sin of all subsequent humanity. The federal relationship in which Adam stood to all humanity served as the basis for the imputation of his guilt to them and the judicial cause of their condemnation. Original sin was at ‘the root of all mankind, and the guilt of this sin was imputed...to all their posterity descended from

Alston, 1761), 85-86, *Reformed Presbyterian Church, Act, Declaration, and Testimony, for the Whole of Our Covenanted Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: 1777), 180.

⁴² The distinction is one of terms rather than of substance. In *WCF.7.3*, it is noted of the covenant of grace that in the said covenant God offers life and salvation to sinners, through Christ, requiring from them faith in him, that they might be saved. In this description of the covenant of grace it is supposed to have been made with believers. However, in *A.31* of the *Larger Catechism* it is stated that the covenant has been made with Christ, and in him with all that are his. It can only be assumed that the Westminster Assembly allowed some latitude in the issue.

⁴³ *WCF*, 7.2.

them by ordinary generation'.⁴⁴ Thus, Adam's posterity experienced 'the guilt of this sin', 'and the same death in sin and corrupted nature'.⁴⁵ Disobedience to this primary covenant relationship made all humanity liable, and all humanity became 'bound over to the wrath of God and curse of the law'.⁴⁶

The terms of the covenant of works were viewed as a continual obligation on humanity. These obligations of perfect obedience either had to be fulfilled personally or vicariously. So the *Confession*, 'Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ...'⁴⁷ In this second covenant, God offered salvation through Christ to the elect. The covenant of grace was not dependent upon individual human effort, but upon the conditions that were fulfilled by Christ. The obedience of Christ, actively fulfilling all the requirements of the covenant of works, and passively receiving the punishment for human sinfulness, legally and effectively became righteousness for the Christian. As the first Adam had been bound to perform the condition of the covenant of works for all those whom he represented, so the second Adam was bound to perform the condition of the covenant of grace for all those whom he represented. The significant difference was that Adam was obliged in his obedience to engage in a covenant with God for his posterity, whereas Christ the second Adam, was disposed to undertake the redemption of his people by his own love. Christ also represented the elect, or all those from eternity who were granted to him by the Father. The rest of the human race was passed over in the decree of election, left to possess the consequences of Adam's disobedience to the covenant of works. By articulating its view of God's sovereignty within the context of a gracious Trinitarian love from eternity (covenant of redemption), solidarity in the creator-creature distinction (covenant of works), and the Divinely salvific purposes in Christ

⁴⁴ Ibid., 6.3.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 6.6.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 12.3.

(covenant of grace), federal theology gave structure to a practical piety. It also sought to be a pervasive schema for interpreting society. James Webster's words summarise well the pervasive application of federal theology when he preached: 'All the Creation is in Covenant with Thee... There is not a stone in the street, not a star in the Heavens, not an Angel above, not a shrub on Earth, but is in Covenant with thee...' ⁴⁸

Post-Revolution ministers proclaimed the message of salvation in covenantal terminology with great fluency and regularity. However, it was those who found their place in the Secession Churches after 1733 who thereafter most emphasized the federal theology. It is significant that the 1736 General Assembly recommended the requirements of the *Westminster Directory* on preaching. *Act VII* outlines the federal framework for preaching, enjoining ministers to:

make it the great scope of their sermons to lead sinners from a covenant of works to a covenant of grace for life and salvation, and from sin and self to precious Christ. And the General Assembly recommends to all who preach the Gospel, when they handle the doctrines of God's redeeming love, and of his free grace in the justification and salvation of sinners, the blessings of the Redeemer's purchase, and privileges of the new and better covenant, to study to manage these subjects so as to lead their hearers unto an abhorrence of sin, the love of God and our neighbours, and the practices of universal holiness... And the Assembly do seriously recommend to all ministers and preachers of the Gospel, that in pressing moral duties or obedience to the law, they show the nature and excellency of Gospel holiness... to show men the corruption and depravity of human nature by their fall in *Adam*... ⁴⁹

It is interesting that *Act VII* was reasserted in the aftermath of the *Marrow* controversy and the formation of the Associate Presbytery, but prior to the final deposing of the Seceders in 1740. The re-issuing of the *Directory* was no doubt a response to the rise of the Associate Presbytery and fears not only that the Seceders would not return to the national Church but that they would be joined by many others who valued their emphasis on federal theology. Evangelicals within the Church of Scotland who still embraced classic federal theology began to disappear by the 1750s. ⁵⁰ C.R. McCain has noted, 'there is less emphasis on

⁴⁸ James Webster, *Sacramental Sermons and Discourses at the Lords Table* (Edinburgh: John Reid, 1705), V.54.

⁴⁹ AGA, 636-637.

⁵⁰ Ian.D.L Clark, 'Moderatism and the Moderate Party in the Church of Scotland, 1752-1805' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Cambridge, 1963), 48-54. The 'Moderates' within the Church of Scotland

covenant theology' in the famed Church of Scotland evangelical John Erskine and that 'the covenant of works is mentioned, but neither the covenant of redemption nor that of grace are treated to any great extent'.⁵¹ One noteworthy exception late in the century was John Colquhoun (1748-1827). An evangelical minister in the Church of Scotland, his theological writings reflected the *Marrow's* practical covenant theology.⁵² However, D.C. Lachman has stated that his 'theology was more in accord with that of the Secession churches than that of his fellow [Church of Scotland] Evangelicals'.⁵³

Doctrinally, all Presbyterians expressed commitment to the *Confession*.⁵⁴ However, the Seceders and Reformed Presbyterians on the whole took the *Confession's* practical application more seriously than Church of Scotland evangelicals or the Relief Presbytery after mid-century. What's more, they interpreted the *Confession's* doctrinal paradigm of federal theology in specific ways.⁵⁵ This was to preserve what they perceived was Scotland's timeless commitment to a boldly assertive view of Divine grace through covenant and the theological foundations behind Scotland's Covenant commitments. When the Seceders formed their Presbytery, they passionately affirmed federal theology albeit in the language of the *Marrow of Modern Divinity*. The Associate Presbytery's 1742 *Act Concerning the Doctrine of Grace (ACDG)*, details their insistence about the 'faithful' proclamation of the 'Gospel-Doctrine'. The entire document is an assertion of federal theology, re-affirming the 'Connexion betwixt God's Covenant of Grace and our Covenant of Duties [i.e., national Covenants], and the Influence the One has upon the other'. It

constituted a party by 1752, and tended to avoid doctrinal preaching altogether in favour of inculcating moral virtues.

⁵¹ C.R. McCain, 'Preaching in Eighteenth-Century Scotland: A Comparative Study of the Extant Sermons of Ralph Erskine, 1685-1752; John Erskine, 1721-1803; and Hugh Blair, 1718-1800' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Edinburgh University, 1946), 233.

⁵² John Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Covenant of Works* (Edinburgh: 1821), John Colquhoun, *Catechism for the Instruction and Direction of Young Communicants...* (Edinburgh: Thomson & Brothers 1824), John Colquhoun, *Sermons, Chiefly on Doctrinal Subjects* (Edinburgh: 1836).

⁵³ David C. Lachman, 'John Colquhoun', in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, ed. Nigel de S. Cameron (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 196.

⁵⁴ Kidd, 'Scotland's Invisible Enlightenment'.

⁵⁵ This will be detailed in Chapters 3-5.

concluded in descriptive federal terminology, ‘There is no Comparison between the Furniture we once had in the first *Adam*, and this Furniture we have in *Christ*’, which was deemed ‘Righteousness for Acceptance, Strength for Assistance, in Every Duty, and particularly in solemn *Vowing* of Obedience to Him, the Spirit of all Grace... for our Use and Behoof...’ ‘So, as for the great Work of *Covenanting* to serve and obey him, we may with humble Confidence set about it in the Faith of this *new Covenant-Furniture* we have in Jesus Christ...’⁵⁶ The Reformed Presbytery later affirmed something similar in 1745.⁵⁷ Kenneth Roxburgh has demonstrated that Thomas Gillespie (1708-1774), founder of the Relief Presbytery, preached from the federal framework.⁵⁸ Although it broadly accepted the federal theology of the *Confession*, the Relief Church was formed almost exclusively as a response to the rigid enforcement of patronage by the Church of Scotland’s General Assembly. Neither Gillespie nor the new Relief Church expressed any support for national covenanting obligations.⁵⁹

The Principle of ‘Perpetual Obligation’

It was not uncommon for Post-Revolution ministers to urge their congregations that Scotland’s piety was dependent both on individual and on corporate allegiance to God.⁶⁰ Applying federal theology to the Church and nation was understood to be the means of more deeply impressing the mandates of the moral law and effecting them within society. The obligation of the moral law extended equally to all humanity (individual and society) through the covenant of works.⁶¹ However, it was thought to extend with greater obligation to

⁵⁶ ACDG, 77. The whole document is on the proper presentation of the ‘Gospel-Doctrine’ within the federal framework. It is also a clear statement and assertion of the theology of the *Marrow*.

⁵⁷ Hutchison, *R.P. History*, 213, 190. Hutchison states that ‘The minutes of Presbytery from 1743-1758 are lost, and all our information regarding this period is derived from other sources, and it is scant enough.’ He also states that in 1745 the Covenants were renewed ‘after the same manner, we presume, as at Auchinsaugh’ in 1712.

⁵⁸ Roxburgh, *Gillespie*, 136-138.

⁵⁹ Struthers, *Relief Church*, 318.

⁶⁰ For example, David Williamson, *Scotland’s Sin, Danger, and Duty...In a Sermon Preach’d at the West-Kirk, August 23d, 1696*. (Edinburgh: 1720). Webster, *Sacramental Sermons*, Sermon IX.115ff.

⁶¹ The weighty concept of the moral law, as it relates to eighteenth-century disputations that surrounded covenanting, is detailed in chapters 4-6.

covenanting Christians—or those who swore to uphold the law by way of national (corporate) Covenant. Thus, it was recognised to ‘be for the honour of God, and the good of the nation, and every person therein’ that the obedience to the moral law through the Covenants’ obligations remain ‘perpetually observed’.⁶² Evangelicals saw themselves as inviolably bound to the national Covenants because of federal theology’s impressing of the moral law to individual, Church and nation. Corporate obedience, inclusive of commands contained within the national Covenant documents, were directly connected as duties of the moral law. The law of God was thought to place a particular obligation on subscribers and their posterity, just as it had for biblical Israel.⁶³ Known as the ‘principle of perpetual obligation’, this theological structure was a fundamental feature of the covenant idea. The obligations of national Covenants were humanly constituted through oaths and vows,⁶⁴ but in obedience to the moral law. National and ecclesiastical obligations, presupposing an analogical connection of Scotland with biblical Israel, were expanded from the law in order to formulate a national confession, or Covenant. Once constituted, a Covenant was meant to be kept because it was sworn in the name of the Lord by a corporate body on behalf of future generations. Such obligations extended to those who immediately swore allegiance, and their posterity. Any infidelity to swearing in the Lord’s name violated the third commandment.⁶⁵ Upholding the Covenant was thought to bring national spiritual prosperity, but in the event of its breach, national calamities could ensue. Regularly proclaimed by Covenant-minded ministers as the standard assumption behind Scotland’s covenanted status,⁶⁶ the ‘principle of perpetual obligation’ continued the significance of covenanting

⁶² John Brown, *Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Secession*, Seventh ed. (Edinburgh: 1793), 9-11.

⁶³ This was Samuel Rutherford’s position. See Coffey, *Rutherford*, 156ff.

⁶⁴ The doctrinal emphasis on ‘Oaths and Vows’, as it related to covenant theology of the *Westminster Confession* and covenanting, will be developed in Chapter 4.

⁶⁵ For example, James Fisher, *Westminster Assembly’s Shorter Catechism Explained...Part Second. Of the Duty Which God Requires of Man*, Tenth ed. (Falkirk: Patrick Mair, 1792), 77-84.

⁶⁶ Hamilton, *Catechism*, 21. John Willison, *Five Sermons Preached before and after the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper* (Edinburgh: J.MackEuen and Company, 1722), II.31, Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, 81-82.

throughout the eighteenth century. The ‘United Societies’, Seceders, and later the Reformed Presbyterians maintained that during the Covenanting period (1638-1643) Scotland’s Covenants were subscribed to by adherents with the view that they would remain of ‘perpetual obligation’. The principle of ‘perpetual obligation’ while formally unspoken in the Revolution Settlement, remained an obvious concern for many Presbyterians, within and without the Church of Scotland.⁶⁷ Hence, the Seceders, like the ‘Societies’ and later the Reformed Presbyterians, advanced their adherence to the ‘principle’ in their various ‘*Testimonies to the Truth*’.⁶⁸ They would be the most vocal preservers of how federal theology’s corporate dimensions applied to Scotland.

Providence and Typology: Backdrop to Covenantal Piety

Federal theology in Scotland, then, was associated with a sense of national feeling. The high ideal for a covenanted nation remained a significant vision among a handful of Church of Scotland evangelicals during the first half of the century. Early eighteenth-century evangelical preaching continued to spread strong national implications of the covenant idea, including the historical connection with Scotland’s ‘Reformation Principles’. Scotland was to be constantly nourished throughout the eighteenth century by sermons which promised prosperity in return for the people’s fidelity to the covenantal promises of God. The republication of literature from the seventeenth century helped to preserve the covenant idea in all its rich imagery and symbolism. Sermons, discourses and treatises from the seventeenth-century covenanting divines, such as Guthrie, Rutherford and Durham, elicited the insatiable longing for revival and promoted an ethos in which eighteenth-century evangelical sermons could connect with the ‘covenanted’ heritage of the past. The constant

⁶⁷ The principle of ‘perpetual obligation’ was held to be a term of ministerial communion by the Secession Synods and the Reformed Presbytery. It was not questioned until the ‘New Light’ controversy began in the last decade of the eighteenth century. *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 81, Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, Preface.

⁶⁸ The ‘*Testimonies to the Truth*’ was the compilation of authoritative documents that formed the confessional standards of the Associate Presbytery. The *Testimony*, or *Testimonies*, evolved from the *Judicial Testimony* of 1735, when the ACDG, the *Act for Renewing the Covenants* (1742-1744), the *Principles on Civil Government*, and the *Answers to Nairn* were subsequently augmented together.

referencing of the seventeenth-century Covenanters exerted powerful influences on both personal spirituality and national morality over many in the Post-Revolution period.⁶⁹ Ministers such as John Willison and the Erskine brothers were 'hardly innovative' in their reinvigoration of devotional imagery used by the Covenanting writers of the past such as Samuel, Rutherford and James Guthrie.⁷⁰ Eighteenth-century evangelical preaching was no longer filled with seventeenth-century political rhetoric on the tyranny of absolute monarchy or the dreaded imposition of Episcopacy on Scottish religion. But it remained filled with longings for revival through the Covenants. Underlying this national feeling of religion were several themes.

First, there was the idea that a nation could identify itself with biblical Israel and also believe itself to be the object of Divine favour. While this identification is a common feature of Post-Reformation Calvinism in general,⁷¹ David Mullan has shown that early seventeenth-century Scots often spoke of Scotland's special national status.⁷² Many eighteenth-century ministers remained keen to preserve this association. Second, inherent to federal theology is a providential view of history. For a covenant-relating God would always hold his chosen people accountable to such a relationship. Intervals of judgement and mercy sensibly seemed to correspond with the ebbs and flows of individual and national piety. Scotland's religious histories, such as John Knox's *History of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland* (1587) and David Calderwood's *True History of the Church of Scotland* (1678), advanced a providentialist view of history.⁷³ While this view hardly led to an accurate portrayal of

⁶⁹ Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival: The Scottish Evangelical Revival of the Eighteenth Century*, 85-88, Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 45-46.

⁷⁰ Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 46. A.R. MacEwan, *The Erskines* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1900), 42.

⁷¹ Some examples of other nations that assumed a covenanted national status are described in: Patrick Collinson, 'A Chosen People? The English Church and the Reformation', *History Today* 36 (1986), Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), 463-491, Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), Paul Regan, 'Calvinism and the Dutch Thesis', in *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Bruce Gordon (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996).

⁷² Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism*, 271-ff.

⁷³ Taylor, *Scottish Pulpit*, 37.

Scotland's history and contributed much to the Covenanting period's political mayhem, it did combine a theological interpretation of the nation's past with expectations for a better future. This in turn produced a third and pivotal theme, that of Scotland's 'remnant' and 'revival'. Early eighteenth-century evangelicals yearned for their nation's 'return to God'. Sermons often pointed to the need for national revival, recalling a covenanted 'golden age' of 1638-1649.⁷⁴ Eighteenth-century Presbyterians who loyally adhered to God's covenant relationship to Scotland were often referred to as the 'remnant'. While these three themes characterised much of early eighteenth-century evangelistic preaching, they began to subside in Church of Scotland evangelical preaching by the 1750s. They would intensify, however, in the preaching of the Seceders and remained strong in Reformed Presbyterian literature.

The *Confession* gave careful attention to the doctrine of Providence, stating 'that God doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things...by His most wise and holy providence'.⁷⁵ This emphasis upon Providence encouraged parishioners to believe that they possessed an intimate connection with God. It gave a purpose both to the everyday life and to the extraordinary events of life. It no doubt made the imagery of the Bible all the more vivid to hearers. When dark events occurred, ministers often interpreted this as Divine anger with Scotland for Covenant breaking.⁷⁶ Providentialist thought was a crucial instrument used to provide comfort in times of distress, promote national piety and arouse personal commitments to God. In 1703, Alexander Hamilton (1663-1738) preached 'Faith's Acting must delight the Soul, because it's attended with comfortable Views of Providence, when a man comes under this Shadow, then he can say, let the Lord do to me what he will, *I know all things shall work together for my Good*, Rom.8.28'.⁷⁷ Thomas Boston preached a series of sermons on the subject of Providence that were subsequently published throughout the eighteenth century. He reiterated throughout that 'It is better to yield to

⁷⁴ Brown, *Historical Account*, 16ff.

⁷⁵ WCF, 5.1.

⁷⁶ Webster, *Sacramental Sermons*, IV.31.

⁷⁷ Alexander Hamilton, *Sermon Explaining the Life of Faith* (Edinburgh: 1705), 20.

Providence...Yielding to the Sovereign Disposal is both our becoming Duty and greatest Interest.'⁷⁸

However, the emphasis on national Providence powerfully influenced perceptions of Scotland's piety. After all the *Confession* stated that

...God doth oftentimes leave for a season His own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption, and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and, to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends.⁷⁹

The General Assembly connected God's providential intervention with the status of Church and State. In a 1708 call for a national day of thanksgiving after the threat of a French invasion had passed, the General Assembly approved that:

considering what a surprising Deliverance the Gracious GOD hath been pleased in His Infinite Goodness to bestow upon Us in this Land, in particular, from a threatened Invasion of cruel Enemies... And that GOD did thus graciously appear for us when we were unworthy of the least kind Regard from him, being a people laden with Iniquity, and that have not rendered unto GOD according to His Benefits, We from a dutiful sense of this signal Care, and seasonable Appearance of Divine Providence for this Church and nation, cannot but look upon it as our Duty, to lift up our Souls in Blessing the GOD of our Salvation for this and all His other Wonders of Mercy, that He hath wrought for this Church and Nation...⁸⁰

Wodrow's *Analecta: or Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences* conveys, at least in its title, this continued attraction to the providential interpretation of Scotland's history.⁸¹

Later, John Gillies' *Historical Collections Relating to Remarkable Periods of the Success of the Gospel* provided an historical survey of God's Providence acting in the Protestant world.

It specifically claimed Divine Providence in Scotland's revivals.⁸² John Willison's

influential *Balm of Gilead*, a compendium of 'Jeramiads' over Divine displeasure, appealed to Providence while longing for Scotland's revival.

⁷⁸ Thomas Boston, *The Sovereignty and Wisdom of God Displayed in the Afflictions of Men...* (Glasgow: John M'Callum, 1752), 67.

⁷⁹ *WCF*, 5.5.

⁸⁰ *Act VII*, *AGA*, 424-425.

⁸¹ Robert Wodrow, *Analecta: Or Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences; Mostly Relating to Scotch Ministers and Christians*, 4 vols., vol. I (Edinburgh: Printed for the Maitland Club, 1843).

⁸² John Gillies, *Historical Collections Relating to Remarkable Periods of the Success of the Gospel*, 2 vols. (Glasgow: 1754).

The time when God is visiting a land with wakening and alarming dispensations of providence, is a season to be carefully improved for saving of the soul. When God doth premonish us that either a storm is coming on the church and land in general, or that death approaches us in particular, we should take warning, like *Noah*, while the evils are at a distances, *be moved with fear, and provide an ark for the saving* of our souls, before the flood of wrath come upon us.⁸³

Even stronger notions of providential intervention can be observed with the rise of the Secession Church. In preaching that ‘God hath left the Church of Scotland and her Judicatories’ because of ‘her many sins’, Ralph Erskine comforted his hearers by declaring: ‘The most dark and dismal days cannot hinder the accomplishment of the divine promise, neither need any dark providence or Heavy dispensation, hinder the exercise of faith, and the life in the divine promise. Nay these cross providences may rather further the life of faith than hinder it’.⁸⁴ Even the Associate Presbytery’s formation became revered as a clear act of Divine Providence. James Fisher’s fiery sermon in 1738, on the centenary of the signing of the National Covenant, defended the Seceders’ published *Testimony*. He declared that it was by Divine Providence the Seceders were ‘raised up to witness for the Truth’ in the ‘National Church’ ‘against the Defections both of former and present Times’.⁸⁵

In 1743, Ebenezer Erskine reflected upon the providential significance of the ceremony about to take place—the ceremony renewing Scotland’s Covenants. He reflected: ‘We, the Ministers of the Associate Presbytery, are this Day met together, in order, through Grace, to renew these Solemn Covenants, in a suitableness unto the Circumstances wherein we stand in holy Providence’.⁸⁶ Erskine then went on to add two remarkable ‘providences’ that coordinated with the ceremony of Covenant renewal that day.

There are two things which I judge somewhat remarkable with respect to the Work we have in View, namely, the Time and the Place of it...I judge it pretty remarkable, that this same Time, hundred Years the Solemn League for Reformation was sworn by Persons of all Ranks through the three Kingdoms of Scotland, England and Ireland; And that, notwithstanding of

⁸³ John Willison, *The Balm of Gilead...* Seventh ed. (Glasgow: William Duncan, 1765), 7.

⁸⁴ Ralph Erskine, *The Promising God, a Performing God..Preached Oct.22nd 1733*, Seventh ed. (Glasgow: William Smith, 1778), 37,39,40.

⁸⁵ James Fisher, *The Inestimable Value of Divine Truth Considered, in a Sermon on Proverbs Xxii* ([Glasgow?]: Duncan Ferguson, 1739), 31.

⁸⁶ Ebenezer Erskine, *Christ Considered as the Nail Fastened in a Sure Place, Bearing All the Glory of His Father's House*. (Edinburgh: David Duncan, 1744), iii.

the strong Efforts of Hell and Earth, since that Time, to have them buried in utter Silence, yet this Day God, in his adorable Providence, is making these Covenant-Engagements with him to peep from under the Ground...2dly. I judge the Place... somewhat remarkable, namely, in the Town of Stirling, where that faithful Witness, Mr. James Guthrie, Minister of the Place was stoned, and otherways maltreated and abused...for his faithful Adherence unto the covenanted-Reformation, and who also suffered Martyrdom in the same cause...And althou' we be shut out of the legal Synagogue of the Place, have not Access to speak in the Pulpit of that eminent Light of our Isreale, yet it is worthy of our Observation, that God has, in his holy Providence, brought a Place of Worship out of the cold Quarry, where we may worship him even in Stirling, and set about the Renovation of our solemn Covenant Allegiance unto the exalted King of Zion.⁸⁷

The Seceders assumed themselves to be prime participants in the grand scheme of Providence whereby God would pour out his Spirit as he had in the past. This would be important in their understanding of revival.

James Russell (d.1817), a Burgher Seceder, maintained as late as 1799 the continuing validity of Scotland's Covenants as evidence of God's providential care of the nation.

Fearful that the Covenants would be dropped from the Secession 'Testimony', he begged the congregation not to 'give up' on

our covenants, which have been so much countenanced in the kind providence of God, both in former and latter periods of the church, carefully read them, examine their matter and contents, with the invaluable ends they were intended to serve; perhaps you will see less cause to listen to the wanton jeers and scoffs used against them...⁸⁸

Such claims of God's providential working in Scotland helped to keep the idea of Scotland's covenanted status alive. Shortly after the Secession, the Church of Scotland minister John Gib (1668-1741) maintained that the piety of the nation and church 'consists in her God and King's covenanted Providence, over and about her, for Protection'.⁸⁹ But by now few others within the national Church would follow Gib.

Hermeneutics in Post-Reformation Scotland could be defined broadly as pre-modern in the sense that ministers did not view the biblical world as altogether culturally dissimilar from

⁸⁷ Ibid., iii-iv.

⁸⁸ James Russell, *On the Perseverance of the Saints, a Sermon* (Glasgow: J.&T. Mennons, 1799), 28.

⁸⁹ John Gib, *Beauty and Strength of Gospel-Zion...A Sermon* (Edinburgh: Matthie, 1743), 19.

their own world. Following a tradition of biblical interpretation emphasizing typology,⁹⁰ covenanting thought rested heavily on Old Testament themes that confirmed the Church as the people of God.⁹¹ Typology represents a conviction that spiritual truth has historic connections which are represented through visible manifestations of God's presence and religious rituals. According to eighteenth-century Scottish typological exegesis, God acted in the contemporary world in ways patterned by his actions in the Bible, particularly regarding Old Testament Israel. This ordering of events, it was thought, demonstrated not only God's providential hand in history, but also his redemptive purpose. In the biblically saturated world of eighteenth-century Scotland, typology was seen as a logical interpretation and commonly employed hermeneutical device.⁹² This produced an ideological identification with the biblical imagery, characters, and events which personally connected Scotland's spiritual heritage with Israel. The priests, covenants, people of God, nation of Israel—all in some sense prefigured the Reformed Church of Scotland.⁹³ Hence, Scotland's covenantal commitments mirrored the symbolic role Israel had possessed in its religious establishments. This pre-Enlightenment assumption is fundamental to understanding the theological structures underlying the Scottish covenant idea and corporate aspirations for piety in the eighteenth century.⁹⁴ These themes continued to inform eighteenth-century sermons.⁹⁵ However, by the latter half of the century, there was less of a consensus, if much at all beyond the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians, concerning the relationship

⁹⁰ Historically, the Christian Church has interpreted portions of the Old Testament personalities, events, and historical experiences of Israel as prefiguring Jesus Christ or the greater Christian Church. E.E. Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 106.

⁹¹ Coffey, *Rutherford*, 79-81, 216-218.

⁹² Two widely published works of the eighteenth century which detail this interpretive method are: John Brown, *Sacred Tropology: Brief View of the Figures; and Explication of the Metaphors...In Scripture* (Edinburgh: John Gray and Gavin Alston, 1768), William McEwen, *Grace and Truth; or, the Glory and Fulness of the Redeemer Displayed...Of the Types, Figures, and Allegories, of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: John Gray and Gavin Alston, 1763).

⁹³ William Mitchel, *Voice of the Tinctarian Doctor's Last Trumpet...* (Edinburgh: 1737), 4, Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, 2,55.

⁹⁴ Henning-Graf Reventlow, *Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (London: SCM, 1984), 106-124.

⁹⁵ Webster, *Sacramental Sermons*, VII.84. John Willison, *Treatise Concerning the Sanctifying of the Lord's Day* (Edinburgh: James M'Euen, 1716), 228-340.

between ancient Israel and the Church. After mid-century this theological method of interpretation set apart Secession and Reformed Presbyterian piety from that of Church of Scotland and Relief Presbytery evangelicals.

Steeped in this providential and typological perception of Scotland's heritage, evangelicals naturally would have interpreted biblical designations such as 'Israel', 'Zion' and 'Jerusalem' as referring to the Reformation and Post-Reformation Church of Scotland. John Gib, parish minister at Cleish, was representative when he maintained:

The Church, both under the *Old and New Testament Dispensation*, is called *Zion*; and sometimes the New Testament Church, in Allusion to the Old, and as typified by it, is called *Zion*, and the city of the living-God...Whatever Beauty, Dignity and Glory Old Zion had, they were but faint shadows of the far more excellent Dignity and Beauty of the *New Testament-Zion*: It may be taken for the Church in general, whose Dignity, Strength and Excellency, may be here set forth, by what is supposed of *Zion*, as Matter of accurate Observation.

What happened to Zion was symbolic of God's purposes for his people for all time.⁹⁶ A preacher who was zealous to preserve the nation's covenanted relationship understood these events as part of redemptive history, David Williamson exclaimed in 1696,

My friends there was never a Nation, Since the days of Ancient *Israel*, more solemnly and explicitly engaged unto the Lord by way of Covenant, than we Have been... He [God] seems loath to give up with us, and has waited long for our Repentance and Reformation, and perhaps he may wait yet sometimes longer.⁹⁷

Alex Black (1764-1846), minister of the Burgher Synod's congregation in Musselburgh, asserted of Scotland as late as 1798 that 'Other nations may be blessed, in providence, with a more fertile soil, with a more salubrious air, with a more enlivening sun with a sky more serene and unclouded; but no nation, under the canopy of heaven, can boast of such an exuberance of the richest spiritual blessings...Let Mount Sion rejoice; let the daughters of

⁹⁶ Gib, *Sermon*, 6,17-18. James Bell, *The Cause of a Church's Being Brought Low, and Her Cure...Preached before the Synod of Angus and Mearns* (Edinburgh: R.Fleming, 1735), 56-57. See also William Wishart, *Gospel Ministers the Strength of a Nation...Preached before His Grace Hugh Earl of Lowdon* (Edinburgh: 1725).

⁹⁷ Williamson, *Scotland's Sin and Danger*, 39-40.

Judah be glad.'⁹⁸ According to Ebenezer Erskine, Scotland was the new Israel from which the 'light of the Gospel' or the 'Lampstand' was to shine forth:

He has ordained the *Places* and parts of the World where it shall be set up and shine. *He gave his statutes unto Jacob, and his testimonies unto Israel, he dealt so not with any nation.* If you ask me, Why, doth God send the Gospel to *Scotland*, and not to many rich and populous Nations who sit in Darkness? Why, the Reason of it is, Even so, oh! Father, for so it hath pleased the, &c...As he ordained the *Places* where the Lamp shall be set up, so he ordained how long it should shine, before it be lifted to another Part of the Earth.⁹⁹

Scotland was envisaged as a 'New Israel'. It was a place that, in the mind of many evangelical preachers, reflected a biblical image of the people of God. Alexander Moncrieff linked 'Israel and Judah and Scotland' together as holding the same obligations as peoples of God.¹⁰⁰ While other nations might hope for Divine favour, David Williamson observed: 'Yet we think *Britain* and *Ireland* has a special Claim to Christ...They are among the *Isles* that are allowed to rejoice, that the Lord Reigns, and more especially *Scotland*, no Church since the days of ancient *Israel* more solemnly engaged to God, and more favoured by him.'¹⁰¹ The Antiburgher leader Adam Gib (1714-1788) preached an ordination sermon in 1783 for a young minister headed to America. Entitled *Christ Has Other Sheep*, the sermon described the doctrine of election and assumed that Scotland was the special object of God's affection. It also spoke of the prospects for a 'new Protestant Empire'. Gib declared:

He sent it ['the Gospel'] in the early ages to Scotland; he has been bringing many of his sheep here, in the course of bypast generations and he is still doing so... And in this latter period he has gone, he is still going much farther off; for bringing his other sheep, in the far remoter climes of America: He will bring them all, as they may be found scattered through the regions of a new Protestant Empire,--wonderfully constituted in that part of the world.¹⁰²

Gib viewed Scotland as a covenanted nation and subscribed to Scotland's Covenants through the Secession *Testimony*, as did the young minister. However, as rigid as Gib was known to

⁹⁸ Alexander Black, *National Blessings Considered and Improved, in a Sermon* (Edinburgh: Ogle, 1798), 7.

⁹⁹ Ebenezer Erskine, *A Lamp Ordained for God's Anointed...* (Glasgow: Robert Urie, 1741), 22.

¹⁰⁰ Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, 57-58.

¹⁰¹ Williamson, *Sermon Preached at the General Assembly, 1703*, 29.

¹⁰² Adam Gib, *Christ Has Other Sheep, Whom He Must Bring* (Edinburgh: Neill and Company, 1783), 34.

be in his theology and personality,¹⁰³ he had an enlarged view of 'God's people' and included the newly emergent American nation among the covenanted people.

Closely following the connection of Scotland with 'Israel', 'Jerusalem' or 'Zion' is the usage of the designation 'Land'. The notion of the 'land' was more than a geographic designation. It also conveyed being under the possession and care of God. Rooted in biblical and covenantal thought, it signified a place of promise and Divine presence. Many Fast-Day sermons reflect the idea of Scotland as a 'Land' covenanted with God. It was a place that God had marked as his own. 'The Lord' is 'jealous for his Land', preached David Williamson.¹⁰⁴ It expressed a national commitment to fulfilling the Divine expectations 'where the Gospel is Professed' and holiness valued.¹⁰⁵ In a 1721 sermon, Gabriel Wilson proclaimed that 'Our Covenants, by Means of which, this Land particularly, had often been solemnly married to the Lord; by Means of which Scotland's Reformation had been, with signal Countenance and Blessing from Heaven, carried on in all the Periods of this Church.'¹⁰⁶ As late as 1800, the Burgher Seceder Robert Campbell (1774-1852), preaching at the 'Society in Stirling for Promoting the Spread of the Gospel among the Heathen', declared:

What were our ancestors previous to the introduction of Christianity in Britain?—They were a miserable horde of naked painted savages...When we recollect the original state of the Caledonians and Britons, and when we think of the situation of more than six hundred millions of our fellow men, lying in darkness...perishing under a cruel superstition...may we not say...that the Lord has been very favourable to our beloved land—a land which has long been the envy of surrounding nations.¹⁰⁷

These ideas of 'land' and associations with biblical Israel enabled the corporate or national implications of federal theology to persist in eighteenth-century piety. Thus, many in

¹⁰³ David Forrester, 'Adam Gib, the Anti-Burgher', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 7 (1941): 141.

¹⁰⁴ Williamson, *Sermon Preached at the General Assembly, 1703*, 29.

¹⁰⁵ Hugh Kennedy, *Sermon Preached at the Opening of the Synod of Merse and Teviotdale...* (Edinburgh: Arthur Armstrong, 1732), 49.

¹⁰⁶ Wilson, *The Trust*, 88.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Campbell, *The Glory of Christ Displayed in the Conversion of the Nations* (Edinburgh: J.Richie, 1800), 20.

Scotland imagined that their nation had been specially selected, but repeatedly shaken and restored by the providential hand of a God who dealt with a people by way of covenant.

Backslidden Conditions of a Nation: Revival and the Faithful Remnant

Evangelical ministers laboured to uphold the nation's covenanted status. Their assumption was that if Scotland were unfaithful to its Covenant commitments, a down pouring of Divine wrath was inevitable. This in turn produced a familiar refrain in their preaching—the prospect of abandonment by God.¹⁰⁸ Sermons drawn particularly from the prophetic books called for obedience and submission to God in Old Testament language. The language of the Prophets invoked God, often calling for him to ‘revive His people’, ‘return’, ‘come down’ or ‘restore’ them.¹⁰⁹ The idea that Scotland was a remnant people preserved by God's pity was highlighted during times of peace and prosperity.¹¹⁰ Yet ministers often exploited this idea in the context of national calamities in order to promote obedience to God's law in the public sphere. Again, ministers did this by drawing parallels with Israel's history and Scotland's present circumstances. Sermons likened Scotland's experience of suffering to that of biblical Israel. Fears of divine desertion or providential calamity, particularly in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, were made only too real as Scotland suffered from the great famine of 1696-1699 and the financial woes resulting from the Darien disaster (1699-1700). Francis Borland (1666-1722), a Church of Scotland minister, was one of the survivors of the Darien expedition. His *Memoirs of Darien* (1715) traced Divine Providence and judgment in the settlement's failures.¹¹¹ Another Church of Scotland minister argued that Scotland's acceptance of the Act of Union (1707) and ministers' submission to the Oath of Abjuration (1712) incited God's wrath upon Scotland and demonstrated a further abandonment of the

¹⁰⁸ Willison, *Balm of Gilead*, 7.

¹⁰⁹ Minister of the Church of Scotland, *A Word in Season* (Edinburgh: Robert Brown, 1714).

¹¹⁰ William McGeorge, *Synod Sermon* (Edinburgh: 1714), 17-18, 37.

¹¹¹ Francis Borland, *Memiors of Darien*, 2nd ed. (Glasgow: Hugh Brown, 1715).

nation's covenanted past.¹¹² Ministers took advantage of Scotland's instabilities as well as what they sensed to be an increase of impiety in order to create a longing for revival.

Anguish over Scotland's 'backslidden' condition was a frequent topic in sermons. As one minister declared in 1701:

*He turneth a fruitful land into Barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein. Utter Ruin and Desolation is often threatened for Sin; And we have in Scripture History many sad Instances of the Execution thereof... We have instances of many other Nations destroyed by Sin. And we have instances of Churches also: Witness, the Church of the Jews, and the seven Churches of Asia; And at this day, the Churches of France, Hungary, and Piedmont, Smart for their heinous sins against GOD. And can we escape, if we go on in Sin? Is Scotland any dearer to GOD than Jerusalem was? Surely, if Sin be not restrained and born down, we cannot escape desolating Judgements.*¹¹³

The longing for national revival continued strongly into the days leading up to the 1733

Secession. John Gowdie delivered a solemn message before the General Assembly shortly following the Secession in 1733, asserting that the national Church needed

*'Universal Reformation of Heart and Life, is unquestionably a Thing that belongs to our Peace. That we return unto that God from whom we have departed, and fly to his Mercy through the Merits of the blessed Redeemer. If we seek God he will be found, but, if we forsake him, he will cast us off for ever: And Woe to us when God departs from us.'*¹¹⁴

Preaching on God's providential care of Esther, the Jews under the Babylonian Captivity, and Nehemiah's prayers for revival and reformation of the land, Henry Lindsay (d.1745) lamented the state of the Scottish Church. In his preface he stated the aim of his sermon was to preserve 'our Mother-Church' from ruin.¹¹⁵ Then, in a sermon delivered after the 1733 Secession, he preached:

*And yet here surely is our Duty, had we more of Heart for it; even in a most publick and ingenuous manner to acknowledge before the Lord the several Steps of our Backsliding... Had we more of Heart and Disposition thereto; in acknowledging of our Iniquities to join therewith fervent Prayer and Supplication to him who is the Hearer of Prayer, and Zion's King, That he would look upon our Affliction, and grant a Reviving of Religion among us...*¹¹⁶

¹¹² G.C., *Scotland's Present Circumstances*, 63-64.

¹¹³ 'Minister of the Church of Scotland', *A Discourse of Suppressing Vice, and Reforming the Vicious*. (Edinburgh: Printed by the Heirs and Successors of Andrew Anderson, 1702), 17.

¹¹⁴ John Gowdie, *A Sermon Preached at the Opening of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Gavin Hamilton and Company, 1734), 3-6, 8.

¹¹⁵ Henry Lindsay, *Present State of the Church of Scotland...A Sermon at the Opening of the Synod of Perth* (Edinburgh: Lumisden and Robertson, 1733), 3-4.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

Lindsay, like many of his evangelical contemporaries, understood the cure for ‘backslidding’ and the means to a national revival to come from a re-affirmation of Scotland’s Covenants. John Willison’s sermons were often marked by desperation for national revival and a return to an imagined piety in Scotland’s past. He averred in the preface to his 1733 Synod sermon:

I am sure it is not much for our Safety, that National and Provincial Fasts are so much neglected, when Providence so loudly call us to the Work of Humiliation and Prayer; When Sin is arriving to so great a Height, when Clouds of Wrath are gathering so fast, when all *Europe* is threatened... and when destructive Divisions and Schisms are ready to break out among us at Home: And O do not these frightful Appearances proclaim it to be a proper season for us to meet, and fast and mourn...and by our united Prayers prevail with God, for Christ’s Sake, to *spare his People, and not give his Heritage to Reproach*, or else he will prepare us to meet him when coming in the Way of His Judgements?¹¹⁷

Willison was among the last of Church of Scotland evangelicals to publish claims that Scotland’s spiritual revival would necessarily coincide with Covenant renewal.¹¹⁸ However, the Seceders would continue to decry national (and particularly ecclesiastical) backslidings. As their numbers grew, they longed for a return to the ways of the past. William Wilson (1690-1741) was one of the original Seceders and chief architect of the Associate Presbytery’s foundational documents.¹¹⁹ His 1738 exhortation must have been remarkable to his audience.

Wait and pray for her [Church of Scotland] Delivery; you have good Ground to hope for that happy Time, because he that has said, *Though shalt go even to Babylon*, has also said, *There shalt thou be delivered*. What you have so good Ground to hope for, ye should be waiting for, and praying for in a Way of Faith. O cry for his Coming! Lift up a Prayer for the Remnant that is left! O cry that he may return in Mercy to *Jerusalem*, that he may hasten a Deliverance to his Church and people, whatever Way he sees meet! O plead that the Wheel of Providence may move swiftly towards the favouring of *Zion*! Cry, cry, Let the Time to savour *Zion* come, even the Time that thou hast set! O cry for a returning God, and a returning Glory! O cry for his Return to *Scotland* our native land, for his Return to every one of us! We are all under sad symptoms of his Anger at this Day...O lift up a prayer for his return!¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Willison, *Church’s Danger*, xx.

¹¹⁸ Willison, *Fair and Impartial*.

¹¹⁹ Brown, *Historical Account*, 32.

¹²⁰ William Wilson, *The Church’s Extremity, Christ’s Opportunity...Preached on July 17. 1738* (Edinburgh: David Duncan, 1747), 47.

The Seceders would take such attitudes into their Covenant renewal ceremonies just a few years later.¹²¹ Like the Reformed Presbyterians, they were to see themselves as the remnant—one that was covenanted to God—and the hope for Scotland's future. The very formation of the Associate Presbytery was seen in the visage of Divine Providence as an instrument of revival. James Fisher proclaimed in 1738 while defending the Seceders' published *Testimony* that it was by 'Providence' that they were 'raised up to witness for the Truth' in Scotland's Church.

Yea, some are so blindly wedded to a *Side*, or give such implicate Faith to their *Leaders*, that, tho' a *Testimony* be published for Truth and against a Current of Defection, a Sight of the Title Page thereof sufficeth them. And I am apt to believe, that the open Appearances of many, against the Truth of Reformation-principles at this Day, is just in Opposition to a few *Ministers* and *Professors* through the Land, whom the Lord in his adorable Providence has raised up to witness for the Truth, and against the Defections both of former and present Times: But let not this surprise you, as if it were some strange Thing; for you will always find that Witness Bearing for the Truth, is *tormenting* to them that *dwell upon the Earth*, Rev. 11.10.¹²²

The Seceders now assumed the role of rescuing the 'Land' by preserving the Reformed religion. Revival and the restoration of the Scottish Church to a 'golden age' of the past, a place where purity of doctrine thrived and the nation recognised its special place in the Divine redemptive plan by way of covenant, became their ambition. In a 1741 sermon, William Wilson confidently envisioned the Secession as a revival, albeit one of a covenanted order.

The Lord hath been taking strange and surprising Steps from the year 1733 to this Day. The Lord thereby is awakening and rousing us up, more than we are thinking...`tis no Difficulty to know where Christ's Standard Stands. We are not any new Confession or Standard, but Scotland's covenanted Standard; and where you see the covenanted Order of the Kirk of Scotland, I am not afraid to say, there you may see Christ's Standard'.¹²³

As we will see, the Seceders were careful to connect their Covenant renewal in Stirling and the whole of their movement with revival.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Renewal ceremonies are the subject of Chapters 5-6

¹²² James Fisher, *The Inestimable Value of Divine Truth Considered* ([Glasgow?]: Duncan Ferguson, 1739), 31.

¹²³ William Wilson, *Day of a Sinner's Believing in Christ...* (Edinburgh: David Duncan, 1742), 59.

¹²⁴ Ralph Erskine, *Covenanted Grace for Covenanting Work* (Edinburgh: David Duncan, 1744), 227-228.

The preservation of Scotland's piety through a robustly evangelical federal theology was the paradigm for religious revival among the Seceders. Thus, the practice of covenanting remained a significant feature of the Secession, as it did with the Reformed Presbytery.¹²⁵ In 1755, the Antiburgher Seceder William Moncrieff preached that revival in Scotland rested on the 'Banner' of the national Covenants 'given [by God] to be displayed because of the Truth in the Land...not only [as] an Evidence that the Lord is in the land, but a Token for Good that he will not leave it...' and which '[God] has been pleased to revive Time after Time'.¹²⁶ As late as 1806, the Reformed Presbyterian David Black proclaimed that 'When God, by his Spirit, brings his church and people' to the exercise of covenanting, 'he often grants them an eminent outpouring of the Spirit'. Quoting Isaiah 46.3-5, he even stated that 'in Scripture we find that covenanting is frequently mentioned as a fruit of the outpouring of the Spirit'. 'In various seasons of covenanting', he confirmed, 'such promises have been eminently fulfilled in the comfortable experience of the Church'. Indeed, 'The happiest times that ever Scotland saw, were the days of covenanting, in the several periods of Reformation...there was then a great harvest of souls to Christ' and the 'Spirit of grace and of prayer' was 'poured out'.¹²⁷ Scotland's Covenant commitments were thought by the 'Societies' and Reformed Presbytery to be inextricably connected to religious revival. However, they felt the State, rather than the Church, was the primary means for enacting reform that would lead to revival.¹²⁸

Preaching thus on the ebbs and flows of Scotland's piety deeply influenced evangelical interests. These expectations of revival and views of Scotland's special place in history were

¹²⁵ Chapters 3-5 will outline covenanting piety.

¹²⁶ William Moncrieff, *Banner Displayed...* (Edinburgh: Sands, Murray, Cochran, 1755), 44-45. An entire sermon is dedicated to this theme in, William Mair, *Jehovah Shammah, the Safety of a Church or Nation* (Glasgow: J.Bryce, 1759).

¹²⁷ David Black, *Covenanter's Directory* (Edinburgh: Pillans&Sons, 1808), 43-45.

¹²⁸ Reformed Presbyterian Church, *Act, Declaration, and Testimony*, 169-170.

important for the nation's religious identity,¹²⁹ and lingered long in popular thought. The laity's interest was piqued by sermons nuanced by revivalistic motifs¹³⁰—often couched in covenantal terms. Many continued to view Scotland as a nation toward which God had directed his favour through continuous interventions. And many more were moved to form small evangelical groupings that decried the spiritual laxity of the nation and Church, but remained expectant on their revival. This is observable in the formation of praying societies. Praying societies existed in many parishes and derived from the seventeenth-century period.¹³¹ As para-church organisations, praying societies sought divine intervention for spiritual revival outside of the parish church. By 1740, the Associate Presbytery officially had recommended the formation of such societies for promoting piety in parishes where a Secession minister was unavailable.¹³² Beyond being directed to study the Bible and pray in society meetings, participants were 'to peruse' the *Westminster Confession* and *Catechisms* to strengthen their faith. They also were to 'study to know and be acquainted with the public cause of Christ...Reformation-Principles and the Testimony of the day, in order to be 'in opposition to the flood of defection and backslidding' which the 'Established Church had so long been going into'.¹³³ These were clear references to Scotland's covenanted obligations. A similar set of directives for 'Praying Societies' was drafted by Church of Scotland evangelicals. First published in 1746 by John Warden, it contained correspondence from John Willison that affirmed the necessity of such societies. It is interesting that the document encouraged parishioners to study the two 'Divine covenants' and carefully did not dissuade any discussions of the Covenants within society meetings as part of Scotland's

¹²⁹ Kenneth Roxburgh, 'Revival: An Aspect of Scottish Identity', in *Religion and National Identity: Wales and Scotland C.1700-2000*, ed. Robert Pope (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 204-205.

¹³⁰ Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 45.

¹³¹ Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival: The Scottish Evangelical Revival of the Eighteenth Century*, 63-66. The praying societies should be differentiated from the 'United Societies' who had repudiated the Revolution Settlement over the National Covenant's exclusion. See Hugh Watt, 'Praying Societies of the Early Eighteenth Century', *Original Secession Magazine* (1934): 49.

¹³² *Associate Presbytery and Synod Records, 1734-1744*, (N.A.S.,CH3/27/3), February 11, 1740.

¹³³ The Act is contained with a republication of John Hepburn, *Rules and Directions for Fellowship-Meetings...To Which Is Annexed, an Act of the Associate Presbytery* (Edinburgh: Sands, Donaldson, Murray, & Cochran, 1756), 11.

'Confession of faith'.¹³⁴ The Reformed Presbytery also published a directory to encourage piety in parishes without a suitable (covenanted) minister.¹³⁵ It seems unimaginable that with the number of published sermons floating around Scotland emphasizing themes of Covenant and revival that they would not have been well-known by members of these societies. More importantly, these societies sought the revival of evangelical fervour in Scotland.¹³⁶ These societies contributed to the Secession's rapid growth. The Erskine Brothers' biographer, MacEwan, observed that 'requests came from seventy or eighty parishes chiefly through Praying Societies' for a minister to establish a congregation.¹³⁷ Hutcheson, the Reformed Presbyterian historian, noted 'There is scarcely room for question, that the rise and progress of the Secession must have reduced the strength of the Societies very considerably'.¹³⁸ These societies represented the passionate longing for revival among the laity that also acknowledged Scotland's Covenant obligations. The Secession movement not only tapped into these zealous groups, they continued to encourage their existence.¹³⁹

Conclusion

The purpose of God, according to the Covenant-minded ministers, was a people whose religious piety was a proper response to the hand of God in selecting them. This national piety was established within the covenantal relationship. Individual piety and embrace of the covenantal relationship with God were the starting point and primary focus of addressing the national need for obedience and a renewal of Scotland's Covenants' obligations. The previous century's ethos, despite its political strife and religious intolerance, survived into the eighteenth century and continued to produce in some quarters an expectation of national righteousness that had everything to do with federal theology. This was the primary impetus

¹³⁴ John Warden, *Duty and Advantage of Religious Societies* (Kilmarnock: J.Wilson, 1783), 18, 20, 49.

¹³⁵ *Short Directory for Religious Societies...Drawn up by the Reformed Presbytery*, (Edinburgh: [1782]).

¹³⁶ J. Davidson, 'Praying Societies', *United Presbyterian Church Magazine* 16 (1899): 251-252.

¹³⁷ MacEwan, *The Erskines*, 88.

¹³⁸ Hutchison, *R.P.History*, 178.

¹³⁹ Mackelvie, *Annals*, 2ff,5.

for ministers continuing to address national defections from God and the obligations connected to the historic national Covenants in the Post-Revolution period. Taking a providential perspective on history, such preachers proclaimed Scotland as following in the line of Israel. The use of typology and an insistence upon the providential orchestration of events is clearly distinct in Church of Scotland evangelicals' until the middle part of the eighteenth century. But few evangelicals in the Church of Scotland would give prominence to Scotland's covenanted identity by the century's end. One minister, John Robertson (1768-1843), emphasized 'Britain as a Chosen Nation' in his 1788 sermon of national thanksgiving. He omitted any reference to the covenant idea. He simply highlighted that God's favour was demonstrated in 'his Providential care' of Britain through William II's coronation and the renewed sense of national prosperity.¹⁴⁰ The Seceders and Reformed Presbyterians believed that a renewal of Scotland's Covenants was vital for national piety, and they regarded the failure to renew the Covenants as the primary cause of Divine displeasure. Covenant renewal, they believed, would be the means of bringing the 'Reformation' into full fruition.¹⁴¹ The Relief Church (from 1761) utilized federal theology as it pertained to individual salvation, and avoided discussion of the national Covenants. The Relief Church affirmed the *Westminster Confession*¹⁴² but not with the same staunch doctrinal adherence as the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians after the 1750s.¹⁴³ The Seceder's passionate utilisation of the federal framework for piety was gradually disregarded within the Church of Scotland by the century's end.¹⁴⁴ They would also maintain an adherence to Scotland's covenanted status while Church of Scotland ministers slowly abandoned it. The Associate and Reformed Presbyteries' insistence that theirs was the historic connection with the Covenanters lasted throughout the century, and was only perpetuated with the language and theology of the past. With such an on-going legacy, is it any wonder that two early

¹⁴⁰ John Robertson, *Britain the Chosen Nation* (Kilmarnock: Wilson, 1788).

¹⁴¹ M'Kerrow, *History*, 184, Hutchison, *R.P.History*, 163-167.

¹⁴² Struthers, *Relief Church*, 318, 291ff.

¹⁴³ Hutchison, *R.P.History*, 213, 242-243.

¹⁴⁴ MacLeod, *Scottish Theology*, 223.

nineteenth-century Scottish novelists, Sir Walter Scott (1772-1832) and James Hogg (1770-1835), would enliven their audiences with the caricatures and vilifications of the Covenanters and their piety?¹⁴⁵

How the classic, seventeenth-century federal theology remained calcified within the Secession and Reformed Presbyterian Churches and the extended debates that surrounded its prolongation within Scotland's evangelical piety remains the subject of the next four chapters.

¹⁴⁵ James Hogg, *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. P.D. Garside (Edinburgh: EUP, 2002), Walter Scott, *Old Mortality* (Reading: Cox and Wyman, 1999). See also, D.M. Murray, 'Martyrs or Madmen? The Covenanters, Sir Walter Scott and Dr Thomas Mccrie', *Innes Review* 43 (1992): 166-175.

CHAPTER THREE

A GRACIOUS COVENANT: FOUNDATIONS OF COVENANT PIETY

The manner with which the covenant idea remained a potent aspect of Scottish spirituality during the eighteenth century is seen in its application to conversion and the Christian life. John Brown of Haddington wrote in the preface of his journal, 'To be *Spiritually minded*, to be habitually disposed, with pleasure and attention, to think of, and desire after Spiritual objects, is life and peace: it implies an interest in the life-giving *Covenant* of peace, which cannot be broken'.¹ Federal theology was the backbone of personal religion among evangelicals throughout the period. It highlighted the doctrine of salvation through divine grace, but equally placed attention on the doctrine of sanctification. This perpetuated the notion that the revival of the Scottish people was connected with the covenant idea. But the covenant relationship's practical implications for the individual and nation were not always clear within Scottish Presbyterianism and required a process of clarification.²

Presbyterians spoke of God's sovereignty in salvific matters while affirming the importance of human responsibility to the commands of God. This tension, encompassing both Divine promise and human obligation, is where Scottish federal theology has largely been misunderstood if not misrepresented. Some have contended that eighteenth-century Scottish theology erroneously understood the covenant of grace as a 'legal' or 'contractual' agreement between God and the convert rather than as a gracious covenant.³ The question is both historical and theological. Was eighteenth-century Scotland's evangelical piety formed

¹ John Brown, *The Christian Journal* (Edinburgh: John Gray and Gavin Alston, 1765), Preface.

² For this process of clarification in other regions, see Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford, 1986), 24, 27. See also Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*.

³ Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology*, 11, 199ff, Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract?' 51-76. Both argue that a doctrine of conditional grace is inherent to federal theology.

around a covenant theology that was grace-oriented or was it based on more legalistic conceptions of the covenant relationship? The answer to that question also has implications for understanding how eighteenth-century personal and corporate covenanting remained justified.

Scottish evangelicals laboured to demonstrate that authentic piety was rooted in a gracious covenant. The Associate Presbytery underscored this importance before outlining what they termed the ‘Covenant Duties’ of every ‘Believer’. They claimed that ‘Faith acting upon this Covenant of rich and free Grace, has a manifold Influence upon our Obedience to the Law’.⁴ The Reformed Presbytery also maintained that the ‘Constitution of the Covenant of Grace’ as ‘a matter of Promise’ was the basis of all Christian ‘duty’ toward God.⁵ Christian commitment or loyalty to the covenant was seen by these groups as a response to Divine action and not a cause of it. The covenant of grace was viewed as the foundation for their piety that conceptualised Christianity entirely within a covenantal framework. In order to understand the rigours of covenantal piety—or covenanting in its personal, ecclesial and national contexts—it is important to see how and why the covenant of grace occupied a central position in its eighteenth-century context. As we will see, it was the *Marrow* controversy’s outcomes that would reinvigorate the seventeenth-century’s covenantal piety. Federal theology’s application and what became known as ‘covenanting’ piety will be carefully considered in the next three chapters.

Entrance into Covenant

Eighteenth-century Presbyterian federal theology emphasized Divine grace. ‘God alone is the Author of this Covenant; we have no hand in the Composing and making of it at all, we do nothing about it...’⁶ The priority given to Divine action is crucial in understanding why evangelicals placed so much emphasis on the covenant idea. For example, in his *Historical*

⁴ *ACDG*, 74.

⁵ Reformed Presbyterian Church, *Act, Declaration, and Testimony*, 186.

⁶ Webster, *Sacramental Sermons*, Sermon V, 51.

Account of the Secession, John Brown stated that Christ, as the ‘Surety of the covenant’, demonstrated ‘That God needs nothing from, nor can be profited by, any creature; and therefore rewards their good actions, merely of his own free-will, and gracious bounty’.⁷

Similarly, William Wilson wanted his Secession congregation to understand the importance of God’s covenant of grace for them. Christ, he proclaimed, ‘is declared’ in the Bible ‘to be given for a Covenant of the People...this Covenant-Transaction is that Bottom and Foundation on which the whole Building of mercy and Grace stands...’⁸

Since the establishment of the covenant of grace was the Divine response to the Fall, it was with the covenant of grace that evangelicals expressed the most interest. Entrance into the covenant relationship was presented as an intimate spiritual encounter with God. James Webster preached that ‘The Love of God appears in the Covenant of Grace’ and as such ‘the Excellency of it appears in the way he takes with Sinners, to bring them within the Bond of the Covenant...’⁹ The covenantal relationship became ‘Proof’ of God’s ‘condescending Goodness, and tender Concern for his Peoples Good...’ This was seen as ‘a wonderful Condescension in God to dispose his Grace into a Covenant-Form...’¹⁰ But the covenant of grace was expected to kindle an even more cherished bond of devotion—that is, a response of fidelity to God’s prescriptive will.

Federal theology gave meaning to the vexing interplay between Divine sovereignty and human responsibility in salvation. It did so through the participatory tension found within the biblical conception of the covenant relationship itself. Rooted in the biblical theme ‘I will be your God and you will be my people’ (*ESV*), this conception encompassed the

⁷ Brown, *Historical Account*, 27.

⁸ William Wilson, *Blessedness Lost in the First Adam...Found in Christ the Second Adam* (Edinburgh: David Duncan, 1747), 15.

⁹ Webster, *Sacramental Sermons*, 108.

¹⁰ Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, 34.

framework of both the Divine promise and its subsequent human response.¹¹ Federal theologians had long affirmed that a biblical faith required an active obedience. Likewise, obedience to Divine law was thought to be grounded in Divine promises.¹² Eighteenth-century Scottish evangelicals saw it no differently. Such an expression was thought to summarise lucidly the significance of the Divine promise of salvation and to inspire a fervent obedience.¹³ Hence, they contextualized the very essence of the Bible's covenantal motif for themselves, owning that God graciously promised to be their God while they sought to respond in thankful obedience.

The terms 'monopleuric' and 'dipleuric' help to define the covenant relationship. These terms help to express the two facets of the covenant relationship comprising the theological tensions of Divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The term 'monopleuric' designates the covenant relationship purely as a (unilateral) Divine act, an act of condescension or favour. This means that the covenant relationship is not fundamentally dependent upon human initiative. However, the term 'dipleuric' designates a mutual (bilateral) dimension of the covenant relationship. Although it was thought that God freely brought humanity into covenant with himself, mutual obligations devolved upon both God and humanity. That is, there were stipulations within the covenant relationship. God had to keep his promise of salvation, and Israel, or the Scottish Church, had to remain faithful to that relationship.

Around 1705, James Webster highlighted this interplay within federal theology when he

¹¹ This covenant formula was referenced from numerous places in the bible including: Genesis 17.8; Exodus 29.45-46; Leviticus 26.12,45; 2 Samuel 7.24; 1 Chronicles 17.22; Jeremiah 7.23; 11.4; 24.7; 30.22; 31.1; 32.38; Ezekiel 11.20; 14.11; 34.24,30; 36.28; 37.23,27; Zechariah 8.8; 10.6; 2 Corinthians 6.16; Hebrews 8.10

¹² Recent debate has surrounded the theological, structure and viability of this tension within Reformed thought. See especially Richard Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 183-189. We address the Scottish context of this debate in Chapter 4.

¹³ This biblical motif is pervasive in the publications and manuscripts alike. Representative of this are Ebenezer Erskine, *The Rainbow of the Covenant Surrounding the Throne of Grace...In Several Sermons* (Glasgow: John Robertson, 1739), 15, Reverend A.H, *Some Things Needful to Be Known and Believed in Order to Personal Covenanting*, [1718?], Edinburgh University, Laing MSS III.358, James Webster, *Two Great Promises of the Covenant of Grace...* (Edinburgh: 1720), 5-6, Willison, *Church's Danger*, 44, John Young, *True Nature of Evangelical Covenanting with God* (Edinburgh: Neill&Co., 1778), 16.

declared at an Edinburgh Communion celebration that ‘The Soul of the Covenant is GOD’s Promising to be their GOD...Fifteen times in the Bible GOD is said to be their GOD...they shall be my People, they were mine by Creation, they were mine by preservation, they were mine by Common Benefites, they were mine by a particular Application, Personal Resignation, and by Covenant’.¹⁴ Webster then elaborated that ‘The very performance’ of the covenant belonged to God. ‘I will pledge my Faithfulness upon it, says God, Come my People take the Pen in your Hand, I will Direct you to Write, I will lead your Hand, I will give you Power to Believe, I will draw your Souls, and when ye have engag’d, I will make you perform, ye shall be my People’.¹⁵ The application of this biblical tension strongly shaped how the covenant idea was applied to the Christian life. Yet it also made ministers cautious about defining what was meant by entering into the covenant of grace, or ‘covenanting’ with God.

Covenant and Election

By structuring their sermons with the two-fold division of the covenants of grace and works, ministers advanced the distinction that all people were related to God by covenant.

Consequently, covenantal language inherently emphasized two distinct groups of people: those who were in the covenant of grace *and* those who were still bound by and within a covenant of works. Prior to the Secession, Thomas Boston instructed his congregation of Ettrick that ‘The two covenants, of works, and of grace, divide the whole world between them: every man is under one of the two; and no man can be under both at the same time, in respect of his state before the Lord.’¹⁶ This of course demonstrated the pervasiveness of the relationship God had with humanity. Boston elaborated that ‘all enter personally into the covenant of works...by natural generation, branches of the first Adam...’¹⁷ Implicitly, this designation accentuated the doctrine of original sin. It was helpful for evangelistic purposes

¹⁴ Webster, *Sacramental Sermons*, Sermon V,41.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Sermon V,52.

¹⁶ Boston, *Covenant of Grace*, 194.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 208.

because it warned hearers of Divine judgement and their inability to achieve exacting obedience to the precepts of God. Explicitly, it served to encourage hearers toward a personal 'interest in Christ'.¹⁸ Thus, ministers emphasized the covenant of grace as the remedy for the unattainable covenant of works. William Moncrieff preached before his Antiburgher Synod: 'it is by Faith only, we are instated in the Covenant of Grace, so thereby only we receive Blessings as coming through the Channel of that Covenant; the Fruits of Christ's Death can be conveyed in no other Channel...of this well-ordered Covenant.—All Mankind are under one of the two Covenants'.¹⁹

By presenting covenant theology in these terms, ministers presupposed the underpinning of the doctrine of election. Adam Gib discussed the intersection of the covenant of grace and the doctrine of election. He stated:

Only some of mankind-sinners are objects of the Covenant of grace. The whole human race was under God's eye, through all their generations, as all in the same fallen estate; all equally sinful and miserable by nature, equally worthy of eternal death in hell, and equally under a natural impossibility of escaping it. But, in the absolute sovereignty of his grace, he distinguished some of them from all the rest; some whom he hath from the beginning chosen to salvation, before the world began.²⁰

By preaching humanity's need of salvation within the parameters of the two covenants, the nature of God's election was kept from being interpreted as cold or overly capricious. It highlighted humanity's plight bound by original sin and accentuated the need of Divine grace. Ralph Erskine more graphically described the distinction between those in covenant with Christ and those outside of the covenant.

Hence we see a mark and character of true believers...they are of God's mind; he hath a respect to the covenant, and they have a respect unto the covenant...they esteem it more than all things in the world; they would not give one promise of it, on which they have been caused to hope, for all the gold of Ophir...their respect to the covenant remains, and their respect to the Maker of the covenant, to the blood and oath of the covenant, to the Spirit of the covenant, and to the blessings and benefits of it. They have an everlasting respect to the

¹⁸ The phrase 'interest in Christ' was a common phrase of the period that was descriptive of a person cognizant of their need for salvation in Christ. Illustrative of the phrase's usage in eighteenth-century Scotland is Gillies, *Historical Collections*.

¹⁹ Moncrieff, *Banner Displayed*, 30.

²⁰ Adam Gib, *Kaina Kai Palaia: Sacred Contemplations: In Three Parts* (Edinburgh: Neil & Co., 1786), 236.

grace of the covenant of grace...They have such an everlasting respect to the covenant, that, when they have nothing in the world to trust to, they will rely on the covenant...²¹

Erskine then contrasted those 'in covenant' with those outside the covenant of grace even labelling them '*strangers to the covenant of promise*' and as people who 'have no respect to the covenant'. Those outside of the covenant of grace he warned:

Your prayers to him are but *like the howling of a dog*, if you have never taken hold of his covenant, nor seen the respect that God hath to the covenant. You have no respect to God, while you have no respect to that which he respects so highly.—And he hath no respect to your persons or performances, so he hath no respect to your tears; they never flowed from faith's views of a pierced Christ...God thinks as little to damn you, as you think little to dishonour him. God thinks as little of you, as you little think of sin, and he hath as little respect to you, as you have little respect to Christ and to the covenant. Wo to you, if you remain in this case...²²

At the end of Erskine's sermon was an offer of the gracious covenant which his congregation was urged to embrace.²³ This also shows that election did not stifle the preaching of 'free grace' or an unconditional, universal offer of Christ. As the Church of Scotland minister and author of an influential *Catechism*, Alexander Hamilton explained: 'the Elect come, or rather are by Divine Efficacy brought into the Bond of God's Covenant of Grace'.²⁴ He also discussed at length 'a Man's closing with God's Covenant of Grace' and termed it as 'God's taking the Elect Sinner actually and savingly into the Bond'.²⁵ Hamilton's catechetical emphasis on the gospel offer to 'elect sinners' in turn demonstrates the influence that the *Marrow of Modern Divinity* was having in Scotland among the evangelical-minded. The covenant of grace was freely offered to all through preaching, although it was understood that only the elect would embrace it. An offer of the covenant of grace to all and not just to the elect was the catalytic issue in the *Marrow* Controversy. Lachman has demonstrated that the adherents to the *Marrow* were in line with the Reformed consensus that 'God has commanded that Christ be offered to the reprobate as well as to the elect'.²⁶ James Fisher, a

²¹ Ralph Erskine, *Faith's Plea Upon God's Word and Covenant* (Dunfermline: Alexander Alison, 1738), 38-39.

²² *Ibid.*, 40.

²³ *Ibid.*, 43ff.

²⁴ Hamilton, *Catechism*, Preface 15.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, preface 11.

²⁶ Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*, 22-36.

contemporary of the controversy who later became one of the original Seceders, exemplified the *Marrow's* theology by highlighting how grace should be taught as the basis of Divine election itself.

We are to teach from the Word, that God has not left all Mankind to perish in a State of Sin and Misery, into which they voluntarily plunged themselves, but, out of his mere good Pleasure, has chosen some to everlasting Life, whom he brings into a State of Salvation by a Covenant of Grace. We are to shew that this Covenant was made with Christ, as the Second Adam, and in him with all the Elect as his Seed.²⁷

Covenant as absolute or conditional

As the delicate balance of Divine sovereignty and human responsibility in salvation had to be held in tension, the nature of faith needed clarification when ministers discussed entrance into the covenant of grace. Defining the covenant relationship as an *absolute* extension of grace was an accentuation of the covenant's monopoleuric dimension. It also helped to differentiate the two covenants of grace and works. If the covenant was absolute, salvation was unconditional and not contingent upon human actions. But if it were conditional, the covenant was in some way contingent upon human responsibility, and this could potentially recreate a covenant of works. An absolute covenant accentuated what was believed to be the illimitable character of Divine grace. The covenant's promise of salvation was embraced by the convert through receptive faith. Neither repentance nor anything meritorious preceded God's gracious offer. The assertion that the covenant of grace was *conditional* meant that faith and possibly repentance and holiness were primarily viewed as the conditions of entrance into the covenant. None would deny that the covenant was gracious. But how the interaction of the covenant of grace and faith was framed needed to be qualified. Such qualifications led to debates over minutiae; even worse, it created confusion. The historical theologian John MacLeod insightfully stated that it was 'not uncommon in those olden-time disputes to find that the quarrel turned on the particular sense in which the words were employed. Men were wedded to the terms of their scheme and system. The system used words in its own sense, so that the difference of a shade in the meaning attached to the key

²⁷ Fisher, *Gospel-Preaching*, 18-19.

words employed might work out inconsistent or seriously discrepant results...in the chief theological discussion' of the controversy, 'there was a good deal of cross-shooting due to misunderstanding as to the precise scheme of Covenant in regard to which the dispute raged. For there was a variety of schemes'.²⁸

Thomas Boston referred in his *Memoirs* to a controversy that occurred 'especially in Fife, where, for several years before, a contest had been agitated, touching the covenant of grace, whether it was absolute or conditional'.²⁹ While little is known about the extent of this controversy and whether this was a direct reference to the issues surrounding the Auchterarder creed,³⁰ it is clear that after 1718, Boston and the 'Marrowmen'³¹ along with many evangelicals in the Church of Scotland affirmed the absolute nature of the covenant of grace. During the first decade of the century, Edinburgh's James Webster disparagingly preached against a group that 'pervert the Gospel, who make Works the Condition of the Covenant of Grace' as if it were a 'Covenant as among Men'. Instead, he proclaimed the covenant of grace to be 'A Promise, a Cluster of Promises, from the beginning to the End' and that 'there is no Work upon our part to procure or deserve any Blessing'.³² Alexander Hamilton similarly affirmed the absolute nature of the covenant. Hamilton was from Fife. His *Catechism* stated that the covenant of grace 'strictly and properly' had no 'conditions' for the convert. He also asserted that Christ had fulfilled all the conditions of the covenant for the elect.³³ Clearly, some were concerned that federal theology was becoming misconstrued. At issue was the nature of the covenant of grace. This had been an ongoing

²⁸ MacLeod, *Scottish Theology*, 147-148.

²⁹ Morrison, ed., *Boston's Memoirs*, 347.

³⁰ The creed was used by the Auchterarder Presbytery during ordination examinations in order to discover a candidate's position as to whether repentance preceded faith, or *vice-versa*. The creed stated 'that it is not sound and orthodox to teach that we must forsake sin, in order to our coming to Christ, and instating us in covenant with God'.

³¹ The 'Marrowmen' is the historic and partisan term for the clergymen who subscribed to the contents of the controversial book before and after the 1718-1723 controversy.

³² Webster, *Sacramental Sermons*, 87-88, Webster, *Two Great Promises*, 3-4, 17-18.

³³ Hamilton, *Catechism*, 18.

tension within seventeenth-century Puritanism.³⁴ Hence, it is not surprising that Scottish theology would have had similar tensions expressed within its federal theology and find itself involved in a similar controversy. Lachman indicated that ‘a considerable part of the Marrow Controversy revolves around whether or not there are conditions in the Covenant of Grace.’³⁵ However, Lachman’s study primarily addresses the controversy’s impact on the doctrine of assurance in salvation rather than the federal system in general. Also, Lachman’s discussion is confined only to the controversy itself and not to how federal theology was conceptualized thereafter. The significance of the controversy for both the subsequent history of federal theology in Scotland and its influence on Scottish evangelical denominationalism after 1733 was great. The need to clarify the nature of the covenant and its relationship to faith is a key to understanding the connection of federal theology and practical piety. Secession and Reformed Presbyterians viewed the *Marrow*’s theological emphases as the basis for covenanting piety. Thus, discussion of the well-worked field of the *Marrow* controversy is unavoidable.

‘Parties’ of the Covenant

A recurrent assertion among evangelical ministers was that God and Christ, (not God and humanity), entered into covenant in order to bring about salvation. The problem in any dialogue about federal theology prior to the *Marrow* controversy was that some maintained a three-covenant view, while others a two-covenant view.³⁶ This added confusion in defining covenantal terminology. Ralph Erskine’s sermons often insisted that a ‘bargain’ had been struck on behalf of ‘needy’ sinners and was intended to be embraced by those needing ‘to close with Christ’.³⁷ Erskine valued the covenant of grace, ‘eternally’ established between

³⁴ This is detailed by, Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*.

³⁵ Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*, 36. Lachman outlined some of the seventeenth-century debate in England and Scotland over whether the covenant of grace was absolute or conditional.

³⁶ See chapter 2.

³⁷ Ralph Erskine, *The Lamb in the Midst of the Throne*. (Glasgow: John Bryce, 1769), 12, 30-33. Erskine would use the theme of the ‘bargain’ between the Father and Son in other sermons. C.f., Ralph Erskine, *Christ the People’s Covenant* (Boston: William M’Alpine, 1770).

the Father and Son, to be a 'bargain' 'worth ten thousand worlds'.³⁸ Erskine maintained that the covenant of grace was divinely administrated in its very founding:

This foundation of God stands sure: this covenant is secured by the oath of God to his eternal Son...He hath sworn that the bargain shall stand, insomuch that if all the devils in hell should attack the weakest believer in Christ, or that ever looked towards a covenant Christ, they cannot ruin him, it is impossible; for the covenant, in which he is wrapt up, is established, drawn up, and concluded betwixt two unchangeable persons, in the presence of that consenting, unchangeable witness, the Holy Ghost...The parties of the covenant of grace are not God and man, but God and Christ; and the believer is no otherways a party, but in Christ: and here is a bottom of everlasting consolation, that Christ and he, are within one and the same covenant; and it stands as sure to them.³⁹

Adam Gib asserted in the later part of the century that 'the establishment of this Covenant is in GOD; when there were no parties without him, or beside him, to be concerned in the making of it...and these *parties* could only be in the *Godhead*...There are two contracting parties in the Covenant of Grace; the first and second Persons of the Holy Trinity'.⁴⁰ Gib, like Erskine, followed in the line of Boston, who saw the covenant of redemption as one and the same with the covenant of grace. Gib even noted that understanding the complex nature of the parties of the covenant was difficult to fathom. 'And in the making of this Covenant,—the Son was most willingly constituted by the Father' as the 'Mediator between God and men'. 'But how this transaction could take place between two equal persons in the same Godhead...is a matter far exceeding finite comprehension; yet cannot, without impiety, be disbelieved on account of its being incomprehensible.'⁴¹ Perhaps Gib was speaking of previous historical debates. But surely this also meant that the covenant relationship between God and humanity was not simplistically viewed by Scottish evangelicals as one of equal parties contracting together. Even the Associate Presbytery demonstrated some doctrinal ambivalence regarding who the parties of the covenant consisted of when they stated that the covenant of grace 'is betwixt Christ, or God in Christ, and them'.⁴²

³⁸ Ralph Erskine, *The Best Bond, or Surest Engagement* ([Edinburgh?]: 1724).

³⁹ Erskine, *People's Covenant*, 52.

⁴⁰ Gib, *Kaina Kai Palaia*, 198-199.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 182-183, 200-201.

⁴² *ACDG*, 26.

Other ministers described the parties of the covenant of grace as God and fallen humanity. John Willison exemplified this position by saying that the covenant was ‘God’s free and gracious [covenant] with elect sinners in CHRIST, proposed to...them in the Gospel...Wherein he graciously and immutably promiseth Pardon, Peace, Grace and Glory to them.’⁴³ Willison, who maintained a three-covenant view, or a separate covenant of redemption, carefully clarified the ‘Parties of the Covenant’ in his *Sacramental Catechism*. In the covenant of works, ‘we have two distinct Parties contracting, GOD...and Man...We have GOD requiring something of man, viz. Obedience to his will...Attended with a Promise of Life upon Obedience; and Threatening of Death upon disobedience.’ Willison also stated that ‘The Federates or Parties covenanting are different: In the Covenant of Redemption, the Father and the Son are the only Parties covenanting; but in the Covenant of Grace, God and the Elect are the Parties.’ Willison qualified ‘that Christ is a Federate in the Covenant of Grace, as well as in that of Redemption, but in different Respects: For in the First he stood as Principal, but in the Second as Surety’. In the covenant of grace, he affirmed, Christ ‘had the Elect joined with him’.⁴⁴ Entrance into the covenant of grace, or faith’s receiving of the covenant, by any sort of merit was impossible. But such qualification also had the effect of making ministers careful to demonstrate that the covenant relationship was not a simple contractual agreement between the convert and God.

There is little doubt that the *Marrow* controversy impacted how covenant theology was to be carefully discussed. The controversy had everything to do with how the covenant of grace was presented to parishioners as well as how terms and the variations of the federal system were defined. Prior to the controversy, Thomas Blackwell (1660-1728) noted divisions within the national Church over conditionality:

what a great Pity is it, That some *great, good and wise* men, should have any Differences, whether more publick or private about this Matter: Some asserting the Covenant, to have a Condition, and others quarrelling the Preaching of *any Condition* in said Covenant: Seeing

⁴³ Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, 11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3,13-14.

that upon the Main, they are agreed; as will clearly appear, if we consider, that, those who plead for and preach up a *Condition*, in the Covenant of Grace, intend nothing meritorious, or in the least inconsistent with the absolute Freeness and Riches of grace, in that Covenant... And as for the different *Phrases* or Words of *Condition*, *Scripture Pre-requisites*, *necessary Qualifications*, *Gospel-Terms*, *decreed Method of bringing to Salvation*, and the like Expressions, often used in preaching the Gospel; what Person judging and speaking impartially, must not own, that all these foresaid Terms, may be most safely used?...all of them perfectly consistent with the preaching up the Glory of the Power and Riches of free Grace in the Covenant.⁴⁵

Interestingly, he attributed the debate to terminology, only to list ‘*Faith*’, ‘*Repentance*’ and ‘*the Necessity and Reasonableness of true Holiness*’ as ‘Pre-requisites’ or conditions to the covenant of grace.⁴⁶ Hugh Maxwell, an opponent of the ‘Marrowmen’, affirmed ‘that tho’ it be granted that God transacted the *Covenant* of Grace with *Christ* as head of the Elect for them, as being Surety for them unto the Father, and that from Eternity; yet God really covenants with them *mediante Christo*, and this is a true mutual Covenant betwixt God and Believers’. In reference to the *Marrow*’s advocates, Maxwell accusatorily asserted that they espoused ‘singular Notions of Gospel-covenant, as being entirely absolute, and no ways conditional’. Maxwell cited ‘the concurring Judgments of the Generality of Orthodox Divines, such as the judicious and learned and sound Pareus, Gomarus, Marckius, Alstedius and Hermannus Witsius, with many others’ as an historical precedent that the covenant of grace was mutual insofar as it was ‘betwixt God and Believers in and through Christ the Mediator’. He maintained that Christ fulfilled the legal condition of the covenant of redemption. Yet Maxwell also asserted that by faith a convert fulfilled the condition of the covenant of grace.⁴⁷ Lachman has pointed out that Maxwell was highly selective as to which of the ‘Orthodox Divines’ of the seventeenth century held to elements of conditionality in the covenant of grace.⁴⁸ Apparently, he was also confused in his discussion of the covenant of grace. William Crawford perhaps best exemplified the confusion such a debate had caused in the Post-Revolution Church:

⁴⁵ Thomas Blackwell, *Schema Sacrum...Of Natural and Revealed Religion* (Edinburgh: 1710), 289-290.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 292-293.

⁴⁷ Hugh Maxwell, *The Beauty and Purity of the Gospel Church* (Edinburgh: 1721), 47-52.

⁴⁸ Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*, 392.

We preach Christ the Wisdom of God, in his appointing Faith to be the Condition of the Covenant of Grace...Perhaps this may be a Way of speaking, not very agreeable to some sound Divines, tho' where the real Difference lies between them and other sound Divines, in this Particular Question, I am not able to perceive...That there is no Merit in Faith, either *ex pacto*, or any way else: That yet Faith interesteth the Sinner in Christ...The difference then lies so intirely in the meaning of a Word, that a Man, upon changing the sense of Terms, must necessarily change his Side in the Question.⁴⁹

During the *Marrow* controversy George Logan (1678-1755), an Edinburgh parish minister, asserted that Rollock, Rutherford, Dickson, and Gillespie advocated the condition of the covenant of grace to be faith.⁵⁰ Robert Riccaltoun (1691-1769), who would later confess sympathy for the 'Marrowmen', criticised Logan's generalization and assumed that the controversy surrounding the *Marrow* was mostly terminological rather than doctrinal. In his mind, the dispute was resolvable. He insisted, 'I'm Confident we must ultimately resolve all *absolute Promises* which take in even these which are called *Conditional* and are *really* Connectional Promises with respect to *after-Benefits among themselves*.'⁵¹

The evangelical John Willison, an opponent of the *Marrow*'s theological language, expressed mutuality in a qualified fashion. 'The *first* covenant [of works] makes the proper condition of life, and the ground of man's justification before God, to be the righteousness performed by the man himself: but the *second* [covenant of grace], declares it to be, the righteousness performed by our surety Christ, apprehended by our faith'.⁵² Elsewhere, he stated, 'God's gracious Promise and our Activity are sweetly coupled together'.⁵³ He thusly referred to faith as 'Conditions of certain Connection, without which we cannot be justified, united to Christ, or inherit his purchased Glory: But Faith is the only instrumental, uniting and applying Condition of our Justification'. Willison carefully termed 'Faith an instrument of applying condition'. Yet, 'faith' itself did not 'entitle' anyone 'to the Blessings of the Covenant, as a Work, Grace, or Habit in us, of Special Excellency and Worth before God'.

⁴⁹ William Crawford, *Christ the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God* (Edinburgh: 1748), 45-46.

⁵⁰ George Logan, *An Essay Upon Gospel and Legal Preaching* (Edinburgh: 1723), 69-70.

⁵¹ Robert Riccaltoun, *Review of an Essay Upon Gospel and Legal Preaching...* (Edinburgh: J.McEuen 1723), 107.

⁵² Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, 17.

⁵³ Willison, *Lord's Day*, 305-307.

He insisted ‘that it is God that works it in us, and that it is he that is the first mover in this, blessed Bargain; he Courts us before we Consent; he Chuses us before we Chuse him... and so this Covenant is all Grace; for tho’ God puts a Condition in it on our Part, yet he graciously works *it* in us, and promises it to us, saying, *Ye shall be my People...*’⁵⁴ In this qualified way, Willison spoke of faith as a condition insofar as it was ‘apprehending of Christ, and applying His righteousness’.⁵⁵ Sometime after the controversy, Ebenezer Erskine, one of the ‘Marrowmen’, posed the question as to how ‘faith’ could be conceived of as a ‘condition’ attached to the covenant of grace. ‘What sort of Covenant is a Covenant of Grace?’ He believed that the ‘Covenant of Grace can be nothing else but an absolute free Grant of all the Riches of Grace...If any-thing were required of us as a Condition of our taking or receiving the Blessings of the Covenant, it would that Moment cease to be a Covenant of Grace’. Erskine’s answer provided an insightful qualification, even addressing the positions of ‘worthy’ seventeenth-century theologians that Blackwell, Maxwell and perhaps others cited as evidence.

I will be loath to condemn that Way of speaking, because worthy Men have used it, and do use it in a sound Sense: But Sirs, I would have you to remember that when it is called a Condition all that such worthy learned men mean by it, is only this, that you can have no saving Benefit or Advantage by Christ unless he be received; you can have no Benefit by God’s Covenant or Promise, unless you believe the promise to be true, and believe it with Application to your own Souls. Faith is just such a Condition as shews the inseparable Connection between the one Thing and another: As if you should say to a Beggar there is your Alms on the Condition that you take it; there is Meat on the Condition that you eat it...Now such a Condition of the Covenant of Grace is Faith; it is just a taking what is freely given without Money and Price; and let it be remembered that itself is one of the Blessings promised in this Covenant.⁵⁶

It is obvious that Erskine was aware of the dangers of conditionality. Moreover, he was hardly rebelling against his theological predecessors. He was, indeed, making a careful qualification.

The dispute over the theological terminology and emphases in the *Marrow* certainly demonstrates how deeply federal Calvinism had calcified within Scotland. At the time of the

⁵⁴ Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, 123.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

⁵⁶ Erskine, *Rainbow of the Covenant*, 43-44.

controversy, ministers were not attempting to alter the federal schema by re-defining the covenant of grace as either absolute or conditional; rather, they were interpreting the finer points of it. Scottish ministers, like others in the Reformed tradition, strove to maintain the Bible's tension between Divine sovereignty and human responsibility through the language of covenant.⁵⁷ The *Marrow* controversy directly and indirectly highlighted the difficulties of this tension. Federal theology, as a coherent system, was not in doubt. Differences in the controversy largely stemmed from terminological inaccuracies and confusion from slightly different formulations of federal theology. With some ministers maintaining a covenant of redemption and others seeing it as a part of the covenant of grace, confusion in the articulation of federal theology was inevitable. McGowan has argued that the General Assembly's committee accused the 'Marrowmen' of antinomianism, whereas the committee was unknowingly neonomian. The 'Marrowmen' were, in actuality, anti-neonomian in their understanding of law and grace within the federal system. Such confusion demonstrates that two forms of federal theology were at work in Scottish theology during the early-eighteenth century.⁵⁸ Lachman's conclusion, that 'There was no clear theological division in the Church in the thirty years following the Revolution...' and that the *Marrow* controversy itself had largely to do with the inability of ministers 'to accept the unfamiliar terminology used in the *Marrow*', is largely convincing.⁵⁹ Still, the historic complexities of federal theology, particularly in light of the influence that seventeenth-century Puritan sources had played in the 1720s controversy, demonstrate how the lack of a consensus over a specific form of federal theology even confined within *Westminster Confession* Calvinism perplexed early eighteenth-century ministers. Given that both sides in the controversy claimed confessional fidelity and neither sought to reject federal theology, it is reasonable to see general unanimity to the federal schema, but variation within Scottish ministers' understanding of it. Further evidence of this is seen in those who later embraced the *Marrow*'s nuances, such as the

⁵⁷ Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*.

⁵⁸ McGowan, *Boston*, 156-159.

⁵⁹ Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*, 199-200.

Secession and Reformed Presbyterians. Both groups fully embraced the *Confession's* federal theology, and endeavoured to preserve it throughout the eighteenth century in line with the *Marrow's* nuances of an absolute covenant.⁶⁰ The objection of these dissenting groups was to an apparent 'legal spirit' in the national Church and what they perceived to be an ever-increasing lack of doctrinal purity, not to a deficient federal theology.⁶¹ Both groups upheld an absolute covenant *and* remained staunchly committed to covenanting and federal theology.

Although there were differing approaches in qualifying how 'faith' was not a conditional act of human achievement, it is evident that some ministers' greatest concern after the *Marrow* controversy was for the graciousness of the covenant to highlight their theology and serve as the basis of piety. This was particularly true with the Secession Synods, but not absent in the Church of Scotland. Adam Gib carefully qualified the dimensions of the covenant's absolute promise and the dangers of what he saw in 'improperly' referring to the covenant in 'conditional' terms. He stated:

So, faith had been called a condition of pardon and acceptance in justification; of a saving interest in Christ, or of salvation through him: But to call faith the condition of the Covenant of Grace, is a downright abuse of the word; as well as perversion of the doctrine of that Covenant. The word in its proper sense, and as used in the present case,—denotes that which in its own nature, or at least by paction, is meritorious of a promised benefit; and is the proper ground of a title to the same. So, perfect obedience was the proper condition of the Covenant of Works; to be meritorious of eternal life: Not indeed by any natural or intrinsic merit of that obedience, but by the paction or agreement which God condescended to make with the first man. The condition of the Covenant of Grace...could be performable only by the Head of that Covenant...which was to lie in his full performance of his undertaking, as to be made under law.⁶²

Gib concluded, 'For all the blessings of grace and glory, we must be wholly indebted to him; to his fulfilled condition of the Covenant of Grace.'⁶³ Gib's contemporary but a minister of the Burgher Synod, John Brown of Haddington, asserted that Christ fully established the

⁶⁰ *Asso.Presbytery Records*, iv-ff, Reformed Presbyterian Church, *Act, Declaration, and Testimony*, 101-102. Some sense of a uniform adherence to a two-covenant formulation of federal theology seems to have been established by the Seceders and carried on through the century.

⁶¹ *ACDG*, 12-15.

⁶² Gib, *Kaina Kai Palaia*, 239-240. See also, Wilson, *Blessedness Lost*, 17.

⁶³ Gib, *Kaina Kai Palaia*, 242.

covenant of grace on behalf of the elect. Brown stated that Christ, 'as Surety [of the covenant], undertook for all the elect, and them only, and gave to the law and justice of God' the required 'obedience and satisfaction' through Christ's 'surety-righteousness, imputed to us'. This was the 'foundation' for all 'forgiveness of sin, acceptance into favour with God, and title to eternal life, and not any thing wrought in, or done by us...that all believers in Christ are fully delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works...' ⁶⁴ Brown also acknowledged that God made the covenant of grace 'With Christ in the elect's name'. In this, 'The condition of the covenant of works' was 'Adam's perfect obedience'. 'The condition of the covenant of grace was Christ's fulfilling all righteousness.' This made the covenant of grace dependable and unbreakable because 'Christ cannot fail as Adam did'. ⁶⁵ As late as 1772, Church of Scotland minister James Oliphant (1734-1818) wrote a *Sacramental Catechism* denying that 'faith, repentance, and sincere obedience be properly called the condition of the covenant of grace'. He also stated that he was 'much rather disposed to consider these as belonging to the administration of the covenant, as it is evident they are PROMISED therein, after a most absolute manner. As to faith in particular, it is the GIFT of God...with what propriety of language can a FREE GIFT be called the condition of a covenant?' ⁶⁶ It is significant, however, that Oliphant's ministerial training began at the Burgher Synod's Theological Hall in Glasgow. ⁶⁷ The *Marrow* controversy's implications for advocating an 'absolute' gracious covenant in salvation remained a pronounced feature of eighteenth-century evangelical thought.

'Taking Hold' of God's Covenant

Although an absolute covenant of grace, administered by God in Christ, it still had to be embraced by the convert. Ministers did not shy away from insisting that parishioners 'take

⁶⁴ Brown, *Historical Account*, 27.

⁶⁵ John Brown, *Two Short Catechisms Mutually Connected* (Edinburgh: Gray and Alston, 1764), 17. John Muckarsie, *Children's Catechism* (Edinburgh: Neill and Co, 1778), 5, 11-15.

⁶⁶ James Oliphant, *Sacramental Catechism* (Edinburgh: J. Guthrie, 1798), 9.

⁶⁷ Michael Jenkins, 'Oliphant, James (1734-1818)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

hold of the covenant'.⁶⁸ In fact, Ebenezer Erskine urged, 'Let the indefinite and absolute Nature of the Covenant of Grace be your Warrant, for embracing the Lord Jesus. The Covenant of Grace...is conceived in the form of a blank Bond, or testamentary Deed, where there is Room left to every man, to fill up his Name, by the Hand of Faith; the Strain and Tenor of it is, *I will be your God and they shall be my People...*' This was so 'every Man may be encouraged to subscribe his Name...in a Way of Believing, by which we are said to take Hold of God's Covenant...'⁶⁹ His brother, Ralph, fervently preached that the way of entering into covenant with God was 'to get yourself wrapt within the bond of this covenant'. This, as Erskine elaborated, could only be done 'by believing and pleading' God's covenant of grace.⁷⁰ When asked how 'a Person may be said to be actually under the Bond of the Covenant', 'whether one may be said to be in Covenant' and whether it was a complete 'Act' of graciousness 'flowing from God', James Hog gave a careful answer. 'The Covenant of Grace, is the Execution of the Compleat Purchase, according to the Covenant of Redemption...' As to who instigated the action of entering into Covenant with God, he responded: 'the proposed Difficulty, I acknowledge it is subtile, but see not any solid foundation for it, seeing the Lords Act, and particularly in bestowing the Spirit, is a work in us, which carryeth always its reflex, back to the Lord, his Work is in this case inseperable [from] what is our Work; and thus nothing remains to be Answered, but this, by whose Act his or ours we are said to be in Covenant; and I am perswaded, that with reference to this, it is chiefly by the Lord's Act' that he 'takes us into Covenant.'⁷¹ In the 1770s, John Brown would plead with the 'Rising Generation' under his care to embrace Christ by way of covenant. The terms were intensely intimate as he pleaded: 'Dear child, say him *not nay*: request him to apprehend it himself, as it is beyond thy power to give it: beg him "the blessed of the LORD, that hath the key of David," to draw it with his promises, his cords of

⁶⁸ John M'Laurin, *Sermons and Essays*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Gray and Wood, 1772), 233, Boston, *Fourfold State*, 220.

⁶⁹ Ebenezer Erskine, *Christ in the Believer's Arms* (Edinburgh: Patrick Walker, 1726), 48.

⁷⁰ Erskine, *Faith's Plea*, 47.

⁷¹ Hog, *Covenants*, 23.

love; to *open* it and *come in*.' Thus Brown would close his sermon, 'May the lovely Bridegroom, the ALMIGHTY SAVIOUR, persuade you!—LORD JESUS, come thyself, and fetch them out of the prison, the pit of corruption, and bring them into the bond of the covenant.'⁷² Around that same time, the Antiburgher John Young (1743-1806) helpfully described this receiving of the covenant of grace. 'God offers the Covenant by Christ in the gospel; the sinner accepts the offer, and gives his consent to every article of the Covenant.'⁷³ As a response to the Divine promise, the convert had the responsibility of receiving the covenant of grace. There was a sense of mutuality in the covenant of grace; a mutuality that required not only Divine promising but also human receiving. The 'sinner' was to comprehend, at least at some level, the intricacies of the covenant relationship. 'He considers it as well-ordered in all things and sure.' The convert 'accounts it all his salvation and all his desire. In this way, 'the happy bargain is struck, and the person is actually in Covenant with God: yet the Covenant by which he stands related to God, is none of his own contriving; the terms were unalterably fixed, before he or any other creature existed; he only gives his consent to them as they are in reality: He is related to God by no other Covenant save that which Christ is the Head; the Covenant of Grace which was made with him from eternity.'⁷⁴ Young added that to 'take hold' of the covenant was:

To lay claim to the covenant of Grace by faith, as [the convert's] only and all-sufficient security for all happiness; and in this way, to lay claim to all that infinite fullness that is laid up in Christ's hand; trusting in the merits of Christ's obedience, and in the unchangeable faithfulness both of God the Father and...the Son...and that he shall eventually be made a partaker of all that happiness and glory which Christ himself now possesses...To this gracious proposal, the sinner in the day of his espousals to Christ, is powerfully determined to say Amen; and so to accept of the offered Covenant, and of all that it contains.⁷⁵

Thus, mutuality itself remained in the sovereign hand of God.

Ministers emphasized that God both established the covenant of grace and drew converts into it. John Bisset (1692-1756) of Aberdeen was a Church of Scotland minister who

⁷² John Brown, *An Address to the Rising Generation*, 9th ed. (Stirling: W. Anderson, 1779), 60.

⁷³ Young, *Evangelical Covenanting*, 14.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

remained apprehensive about joining the Seceders but advocated covenanting piety.⁷⁶ Bisset affirmed that in the covenant of grace Christ ‘contracts for both parties, carrying the relation of a party, both upward to God, and downward to us. He waiteth and covenanteth for God with us; and he treateth and covenanteth for us with God, which, upon the matter is to carry both parties in his person.’⁷⁷ This primary movement of God in the establishment of the covenantal relationship within the convert was clearly important to ministers. Ralph Erskine similarly preached, ‘When God delivers his people, it is in remembrance of his covenant.’⁷⁸ He then preached that God ‘makes the covenant take hold of us, and makes us take hold of the covenant; for then he makes us put respect upon him and upon his covenant’. He pleaded with his audience, ‘let your case be the worst case out of hell, this covenant contains all *salvation* as a covenant of grace...’⁷⁹ His brother cautioned that it was God who initiated the covenant relationship and not man. Ebenezer implored his audience, ‘Beware of thinking that the Covenant is of your making. Yet, he acknowledged the convert’s responsibility to embrace the covenant. ‘It is indeed your Duty to take hold of God’s Covenant, and to come under Engagements through the Grace thereof to observe all the Duties commanded in the Law; but do not think that your engaging or promising and covenanting do make or constitute the Covenant of Grace’. Hence, Erskine vehemently affirmed the Divine presence in initiating faith in a convert. ‘No, it is God that both makes the Covenant, and leads our heart and hand in taking hold of it, and in engaging to these Duties of Obedience, which are consequential unto our being in Covenant with the Lord’.⁸⁰

‘Taking hold of the covenant’ with God was a formal acknowledgment of, and response to, God’s gracious provision. Each of the pastor-theologians viewed the covenant of grace as fully established within God’s promise of redemption secured by Christ. It was a reliance on

⁷⁶ Robert Small, *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church from 1733-1900* 2 vols., vol. 1 (Edinburgh: D.M.Small, 1904), 14ff.

⁷⁷ Bissett, *Christ the Covenant*, 23-34.

⁷⁸ Erskine, *Faith’s Plea*, 27.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁸⁰ Erskine, *Rainbow of the Covenant*, 15.

this covenant promise itself—that Christ had accomplished the condition of obedience for the covenant of works and that the covenant of grace rested on his accomplishment of redemption—that ministers laboured for their hearers to understand. For these evangelicals consumed with a robust covenantal piety, God was the primary and ‘absolute’ author of the covenant relationship. Human involvement in the covenant of grace was, in essence, only an acceptance of its promises.

Covenant and Union with Christ

The full realization of the covenant relationship was union with Christ. It was by faith (or acceptance) that the covenant relationship with God was made personal. Faith was not simply believing that the covenant of grace was true—neither was it a person’s believing that that they were particularly elected to eternal life, but a personal taking hold of Christ on the offer of salvation. In this way, ministers maintained that ‘vital’ union with Christ was central to their covenant theology.⁸¹ Alexander Moncrieff insisted that by grace a convert ‘is united to the Lord Jesus Christ the Covenant-Head, and thereby...personally entered into the Covenant of Grace’.⁸² By emphasizing the need for hearers to ‘take hold’ of the covenant by faith, ministers maintained that converts had an experiential connection to the very foundation of the covenant. Such experiential theology provided assurance to the distressed as it encouraged converts toward a greater responsibility in their obedience to God. As Thomas Boston described, ‘uniting with Christ the head of covenant, is a sinner’s formal entering into the covenant: the which uniting with him being by faith on him, it is evident that it is by believing on Christ a sinner embraceth, enters into, and is instated into the covenant unto salvation.’⁸³

The doctrine of union with Christ was discussed in the combination of both legal and relational terms. Alexander Hamilton detailed ‘Man’s closing with God’s *Covenant of*

⁸¹ Fisher, *Gospel-Preaching*, 40.

⁸² Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, 33.

⁸³ Boston, *Covenant of Grace*, 209.

Grace, or rather God's taking the elect Sinner actually and savingly into the bond'. He used both legal and relational terminology such as, 'a Believing in God, and on him that justifyeth the Ungodly', 'Believing in Christ and on his Name', 'Believing in the Gospel', Believing the Record that God hath given of his Son', A Receiving of Him...and Looking to Him for Salvation', 'Flying for Refuge, and Laying hold upon the Hope', 'Embracing of the Promises', and the 'taking hold of his Covenant' and an 'adjoining ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant never to be forgotten'. Hamilton asserted 'all efficiency in closing with God's *Covenant of Grace* by Faith, is denied to Man, as a thing not in his natural Power,' but 'ascribed to the Divine Spirit'. Hamilton further clarified that union with Christ was 'with respect unto the whole Accomplishment of the Covenant Blessings', since 'Christ is made' for 'Believers' 'Wisdom Righteousness, Sanctification, and complete Redemption'. Moreover, entering into the gracious covenant meant that the 'Act of Faith...whereby we close with Christ for Salvation' included the reception of all 'particular Acts of Saving Faith...such as Justifying Faith, whereby we receive Christ as the Lord our Righteousness, for Remission of all our Sins, and Acceptance of our Persons as Righteous in his Sight...' thus being 'made Heirs according to the Hope of Eternal Life.'⁸⁴ Boston reiterated this position: 'You must wholly trust on him as your Saviour, and in his righteousness as made over to you; and that for his whole salvation to you in particular, upon the ground of God's faithfulness in his word. And this is that saving faith, or believing on Christ Jesus, by which a sinner is united to him, and personally entered within the covenant of grace unto salvation.'⁸⁵ John Bisset made reference to the legal nature of the doctrine of justification, but also nuanced it in relational terms. He stated that God's 'great design of favour, carried on by[the] covenant of grace, is an union of man with God, a restoring of man, to a state of friendship with God...'⁸⁶ In his discussion on the promises of the covenant of grace Adam Gib asserted that 'Believers' would 'receive all' the 'promises' of that covenant 'only in a

⁸⁴ Hamilton, *Catechism*, Preface 13-15.

⁸⁵ Boston, *Covenant of Grace*, 225.

⁸⁶ Bissett, *Christ the Covenant*, 23-34.

state of mystical union with [Christ]' since [Christ] was primary recipient of all the promises. Their receiving of all was to be in receiving him, and resting upon him for salvation; receiving him, unto a receiving of all in and with him...'⁸⁷ Therefore, union with Christ was a comprehensive way to speak of the covenant's application in a convert's life. This was best exemplified by William Crawford's summary of the connection. 'Tis a federal Union; he is the Representative, they are the Represented, whereby his Righteousness and his Satisfaction becomes theirs...`Tis a Spiritual Union, whereby Christ is the head, and Believers are the members; and as the head communicates Life and Sense to the rest of the Body, so the Spirit of Christ dwelling in believers communicates Light, Life, Strength and Comfort to their Souls...`Tis a vital Union...`Tis a indissoluble Union...`Tis a mystical Union compared to the ineffable Union between the Father and the Son...And yet 'tis real and intelligible'.⁸⁸ By emphasizing the covenant in both legal and relational terms, ministers demonstrated fidelity to the *Confession*. The *Larger Catechism* affirmed that 'justification, adoption and sanctification' 'manifests' the Christians's 'union with [Christ]'.⁸⁹ In this way ministers understood that union with Christ structured each aspect of the *ordo salutis* within federal theology. Thus, eighteenth-century ministers acted not out of innovation but according to historical and theological precedent.

There is little doubt that confusion existed over the question of the absolute or conditional nature of the covenant of grace. It is extremely difficult to find eighteenth-century Presbyterians after the *Marrow* controversy who are willing to clarify the covenant of grace as having conditions other than faith attached to it. Moreover, faith as a condition of the covenant was itself qualified as a 'gift of grace' a 'condition of connection'. Even more difficult to find is evidence that ministers viewed the covenant as having strictly meritorious or unqualified conditions attached to it. M.C. Bell's insistence that inherent in (Scottish)

⁸⁷ Gib, *Kaina Kai Palaia*, 244.

⁸⁸ William Crawford, *A Short Practical Catechism...In the Principal Articles of the Christian Religion* (Edinburgh: R. Fleming and Company, 1734), 65, 74,92.

⁸⁹ WCF, Larger Catechism Q/A.69.

federal theology were notions of conditionality to God's gracious covenant thereby making it a legal 'contract' rather than a biblical 'covenant' is exaggerated. His theory assumes that federal theology was monolithic and without variegation. Bell saw 'the prejudicial confines of the Federal presuppositions' unable to declare 'the free and unconditional nature of grace' until the nineteenth century.⁹⁰ Yet it seems evident that many who maintained federal theology also sought to champion an unconditional and absolute covenant of free grace. More certain is the fact that eighteenth-century evangelical ministers affirmed the absolute nature of the covenant of grace before, during and after the *Marrow* controversy.

Almost as a battle cry, the intensely orthodox Secession and Reformed Presbyterians repeatedly asserted the gracious foundation of the covenant. This contradicts the underlying assumption of John Carson's thesis that the original Seceders' 'definition of covenant was influenced by their understanding of the covenant of works' since 'they taught that the covenant of grace was a remaking of the covenant of works with Christ'. Carson also mistakenly assumed that for the original Seceders 'a covenant was based upon a legal arrangement because it had a promise which was dependent upon the performance of a condition'.⁹¹ The priority to preserve federal theology in the Secession Church, as seen in a number of its ministers, expressly contradicts this assertion. Their *ACDG* (1742) emphasized, contrary to the General Assembly's verdict with regard to the 'Marrowmen', that 'All the Covenant that Believers are to have Regard unto for Life and Salvation, is the free and gracious Covenant...in this Covenant, there is not any Condition or law to be performed, on Man's Part, by himself'.⁹² Similarly critical of 'contractual federalism', T.F. Torrance stated that 'When the leaders of the Secession renewed adherence' to the National

⁹⁰ Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology*, 199. Bell follows the lines of James B. Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract?' 60ff. Torrance, 'Covenant Concept': 239-240. James B. Torrance, 'Strengths and Weaknesses of the Westminster Theology', in *The Westminster Confession of Faith in the Church Today: Papers Prepared for the Church of Scotland Panel on Doctrine* (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1982), 40-53.

⁹¹ Carson, 'The Doctrine of the Church in the Secession', 28-37.

⁹² *ACDG*, 26.

Covenant and Solemn League and Covenant in 1743, ‘the Secession moved away from the stance of the Marrowmen...’⁹³ This also seems improbable based on late eighteenth-century Secession ministers’ firm commitment to an absolute covenant. Bell, Carson, T.F. Torrance and J.B. Torrance’s⁹⁴ assertions that eighteenth-century evangelicals continued to view the covenant of grace in legal and contractual terminology gravely oversimplified the complexity of federal theology. There were clearly a number of ministers who insisted on an unconditional absolute covenant.

Evangelical ministers understood the nexus of salvation and covenantal piety to be solely of Divine initiative. However complex federal theology in its variegated forms might have been, it was the language of salvation for evangelicals. Moreover, those who asserted an absolute covenant grew in number and remained committed to covenanting piety through richly personal expressions of faithfulness.

Piety and Personal Covenanting

Personal piety was entrenched in the language of covenant. The covenant of grace was also viewed as the basis of personal sanctification. This is seen in the ideas underlying a practice known as personal covenanting. Personal covenanting was a devotional exercise of consecration. It bridged the gap between a theoretical and experiential religion. Converts, it was thought, entered into the covenant of grace or covenanted with God. Acceptance of the covenant by faith—a convert’s dependence upon the promises of the covenanting God in Christ—also enabled them to resolve to walk in obedience. This, eighteenth-century evangelicals affirmed, was personal covenanting with God. However, there were careful qualifications. Pastor-theologians warily defined the merits of such a practice, even warning of its potential dangers. They feared that the practice could potentially create confusion over the nature of faith, or add conditionality to the covenant of grace. Judging from the ministers

⁹³ Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 247.

⁹⁴ J.B. Torrance also accused the ‘Secession’ Churches and ‘evangelicals’ of legalism. Torrance, ‘Covenant or Contract?’ 67, 70, 74.

who discussed personal covenanting and the theological concepts connected with it, the practice ostensibly was an issue of the *Marrow* controversy.

The precise origins of personal covenanting are difficult to identify. Jens Møller identified the practice in England in the midst of the early Puritan developments of federal theology.⁹⁵ Others have indicated its influence in English Puritanism.⁹⁶ David Mullan has traced the practice from England to New England and also to Scotland, where its 'next important developments' occurred. While the practice existed in Scotland from at least the time of the Covenanting period, and perhaps as early as the 1590s, it became a well-established aspect of Reformed piety by the mid-seventeenth century.⁹⁷ Mullan also has demonstrated that within the literary genre of seventeenth-century Christian autobiography, personal covenanting survived into the eighteenth century.⁹⁸ In a chapter of his 1965 thesis, S.A. Woodruff briefly discussed the utilization of personal covenanting in the lives and pastoral ministries of Church of Scotland evangelicals Thomas Boston and John Willison. Woodruff indicated that personal covenanting, as a written genre of piety, was an important element in eighteenth-century devotional life.⁹⁹ He described the ritual as communicating 'in a visible way' 'the duty of the believer' by impressing 'the importance of commitment on him', helping 'to strengthen the believer's faith' by disclosing 'the seriousness of his decision' and even serving as 'a concrete reminder of that decision' in times when one could be 'assailed by doubts about his salvation'.¹⁰⁰ Hence, Woodruff saw personal covenanting as a means of assurance of salvation and earnest devotion. Although unable to elaborate on personal covenanting in more detail, Woodruff rightly connected the writing of a personal covenant,

⁹⁵ Jens G. Møller, 'The Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14 (1963): 65-67.

⁹⁶ Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), 353-382.

⁹⁷ Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism*, 201, David G. Mullan, *Lively Memories and Useful Lives: Religious Narrative in Early-Modern Scotland* (Sydney, Nova Scotia: Cape Breton, 2006), 276-278.

⁹⁸ Mullan, *Lively Memories*, 301.

⁹⁹ S.A. Woodruff, 'Pastoral Ministry in the Church of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century, with Special Reference to Thomas Boston, John Willison and John Erskine' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh 1965-66), 91.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

as outlined by Boston and Willison, to a believer's acceptance of God's covenant and a deeper devotional commitment to God. However, Woodruff, limited by the scope of his study, did not show the pervasiveness of the practice in eighteenth-century Scotland or its connection to the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians. Neither did he remark on the careful theological distinctions made by pastor-theologians concerning personal covenanting's connections with sanctification, the Sacraments, and corporate (ecclesiastical/national) covenanting.

Eighteenth-century Presbyterians relied heavily, though not exclusively, on seventeenth-century sources which Mullan's study ably highlighted. He showed the importance of personal covenanting as it related to the form of piety he termed 'matrimony metaphorical'. After indicating that a relational love language of matrimony possessed a long-standing heritage within Scottish piety, Mullan observed that its use helped to form a tradition promulgated by several eminent Covenanters, notably George and Patrick Gillespie, Samuel Rutherford and James Guthrie. Personal covenanting, he argued, became a subtle replacement for the language of 'matrimonial metaphorical' or the believer's language of love and commitment with Christ.¹⁰¹ According to Mullan, 'it was almost certainly in Scotland that this genre of self-commitment came to full blossom.'¹⁰² Rutherford's *Covenant of Life Opened* (1655) and [Patrick?] Gillespie's *Ark of the Testament Opened* clearly articulated the personal nature of God's covenant with humanity with graphic imageries of love and relationships. Rutherford stated:

Blessed we to be unite[d] to him every way, and to joine our Amen and consent to the Covenant: yea, and in regard of profession, we should subscribe and write our names to it...maimed and broken and half consent proclaims an overly and cold Covenanting. Its true, parties are but once married, once Covenanting by oath is as good as twenty: but frequent and multiplied acts of marriage-love adde a great deal of firmnesse and of strength to the Marriage band, they are confirmations of our first subscription. Renewed acts of faith to take

¹⁰¹ Mullan, *Lively Memories*, 300-301. See also David G. Mullan, ed., *Protestant Piety in Early-Modern Scotland: Letters, Lives, and Covenants, 1650-1712*, vol. 14 (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 2005).

¹⁰² Mullan, *Lively Memories*, 291.

Christ...and renewed acts of love, do more and more ingadge the heart to Christ as Lord and King.¹⁰³

A.R. MacEwan mentioned that Ebenezer Erskine was influenced by Rutherford's own deathbed personal covenant and that Ralph Erskine heavily relied on Rutherford's personalization of the believer's relationship to God through devotional and poetic works reminiscent of the *Canticles*.¹⁰⁴ This is evident from Ralph Erskine's poetry, illustrated in one piece entitled *The Believer's Dowry*, where he personalized the believer's covenantal relationship with God.

Omniscient Being favour my Desire,
Hide not Thy Goodness in paternal Ire:
Why thou hast given in an eternal Band
To *Jacob* and his Seed, thy royal Hand
And Promist by thy Sacred Deity,
His King and Covenanted God to be
Therefore my Hopes are center'd all on thee.¹⁰⁵

Ralph Erskine even dedicated a number of sermons to illustrating the covenant relationship as what Mullan termed 'matrimonial' language.¹⁰⁶ John Willison called personal covenanting a 'Marriage-Covenant', again reflecting Rutherford. This advanced an intimate and personal connection between the Christian and God.¹⁰⁷ Such powerful images from the evangelical pulpit, along with the constant dissemination of devotional literature, conceptualised the covenant relationship God had with his people to be intimate and personally accessible.

The most influential discussion on personal covenanting, appeared in Guthrie's *The Christian's Great Interest* (1659). John Willison cited Guthrie as a key source on the subject

¹⁰³ Samuel Rutherford, *Covenant of Life Opened: Or, a Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (Edinburgh: 1655), 351.

¹⁰⁴ MacEwan, *The Erskines*, 39,42.

¹⁰⁵ Ralph Erskine, *Gospel-Sonnets: Or, Spiritual Songs*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: John Briggs, 1732), 104. See also Ralph Erskine, *The Believer's Dowry* (Edinburgh: Robert Brown, 1720).

¹⁰⁶ See Ralph Erskine, *The Best Match... Incomparable Marriage between the Creator and the Creature...* (1722), Ralph Erskine, *Christ's Love-Suit Reinforced and Repeated; or, His Kindly Gospel-Call Renewed* (Edinburgh: Lumisden and Company, 1752).

¹⁰⁷ Willison, *Lord's Day*, 307.

of personal religion and mirrored his formulation of personal covenanting.¹⁰⁸ *The Christian's Great Interest* elaborated on the depth of emotional and wilful commitment that personal covenants were intended to evoke. In this work, personal covenanting emphasized the particular and personal nature of the covenant of grace in the life of the believer.¹⁰⁹ In 1796 the publishers of John Howie's (1735-1793) *Memoirs* cited both Guthrie and Willison as the chief writers to consult on the subject of personal covenanting. They also noted that 'many others since [the time of Willison have] both put it in practice, and defended the equity thereof to good purpose'.¹¹⁰ Thomas Bell stated in a series of sermons dated 1778-79, that 'Guthrie, Boston, Willison, and [Phillip] Doddridge...have all urged personal covenanting'.¹¹¹ By the early eighteenth century, personal covenanting was a common feature of evangelical Presbyterian piety.

Another key source for personal covenanting in the Post-Revolution period was John Spalding's (1631?-1699) *Synaxis Sacra* (1703). Spalding's work according to John MacLeod, 'gives a specimen of the sort of preaching one might look for at a communion season' and as a 'representative document of the period'.¹¹² George Wemyss described personal covenanting in the preface of Spalding's classic. He claimed personal covenanting was 'to lay more to Heart' in order 'to secure an Interest in Christ; To draw nearer to GOD by the exercise of Faith, Repentance, Love, Holiness, Self-denyal, and new Obedience; And with their utmost care and diligence to be providing a rich Stock of Grace and saving Knowledge.'¹¹³ Spalding's work connected the intimacy of personal covenanting with the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 110.

¹⁰⁹ William Guthrie, *Christian's Great Interest* (Edinburgh: Brown and Mosman, 1724), 241-243.

¹¹⁰ John Howie, *Memoirs of the Life of John Howie* (Glasgow: James Howie, 1796), x.

¹¹¹ Thomas Bell, *Standard of the Spirit Lifted up against the Enemy...* (Glasgow: William Smith, 1780), 173.

¹¹² MacLeod, *Scottish Theology*, 112.

¹¹³ John Spalding, *Synaxis Sacra; or, a Collection of Sermons Preached at Several Communion; Together with Speeches at the Tables, Both before, at, and after That ...* (Edinburgh: Printed by the heirs and successors of Andrew Anderson, 1703), Preface.

sacramental season.¹¹⁴ Spalding described the ritual of personal covenanting as being ‘done three ways.’

1. *Secretly* or inwardly, when the Lord by His Spirit on thy Bed, or in the Fields, or when thou are walking or riding by the way, doth suggest into thy mind the offer of Christ, and thy engagement to be his, thy soul then in thy inward thoughts closes with the offer, and though resigns thy self up to him in a serious and saddain Ejaculation. 2. Publicly *implicitly*, when the offer of Christ is made by a Messenger of Jesus Christ in the preaching and Sacraments, thou in thy heart gives a hearty consent to the offer, and in thy heart cleaves to it, and says Amen, so be it, let him be my God and I will be his servant... and if it were expedient ye would say it with your tongue, and speak it out and say, content, Amen, he shall by my Lord, and I will be his servant... Now this is a bargain and personal covenanting...3. This is done *explicitly* by word of mouth and personally being sifted before the Lord at a convenient time, and in a retired place and free of other diversions, and when the soul is in a frame for it, and when (as at this time) of a communion they have a call to it...And in compliance with this Scripture some have had this personal Covenant written and subscribed beside them, and found among their Papers when they have been dead...¹¹⁵

Spalding’s theological framework of the relationship between faith and personal covenanting is a key bridge between the seventeenth-century Covenanting period and eighteenth-century evangelical emphases maintained by Boston and Willison and the Seceders.

The middle of the eighteenth century witnessed the Seceders re-emphasizing Spalding’s themes. This is clear from a Church of Scotland minister and close friend of the original Seceders, Alexander Hamilton¹¹⁶ who attributed their dependency on personal covenanting to Scotland’s ‘Divines’.¹¹⁷ As late as 1798, William Willis stated ‘that every genuine Christian is a covenanter with God...in relation to the divine promise’.¹¹⁸ In 1799, Dr. Archibald Mason (d.1831), Wishaw’s Reformed Presbyterian minister and the Presbytery’s theologian, similarly stated,

Few will be disposed to deny, that personal covenanting with God is one of the sacred duties of religion, which Christians should perform...Christians perform this sacred spiritual duty, when they, in the exercise of grace, solemnly renounce all false confidences for salvation, take hold of God’s covenant, yield themselves to the Lord, and promise and vow, in his strength, to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world. The person who lives in the neglect of this duty, omits an exercise

¹¹⁴ The connection of the covenant idea and Scottish Communion seasons will be addressed in Chapter 5.

¹¹⁵ Spalding, *Synaxis Sacra*, 20-21.

¹¹⁶ Hamilton was close to the original Seceders. Dying shortly before the Secession, it is likely he would have joined the movement. Ralph Erskine, *An Elegy...On the Much Lamented Death of Alex. Hamilton* (Edinburgh: 1739), 14-20.

¹¹⁷ Hamilton, *Catechism*, Preface 16.

¹¹⁸ Willis, *Ministerial Faithfulness*, 131.

which is eminently calculated, and often signally blessed to promote the holiness and comfort of believers.¹¹⁹

There were others who evidently viewed personal covenanting, at least as they instructed children, as ‘an absolutely necessary act’.¹²⁰ The ‘covenanted’ and revival-minded Seceders along with the politically-reactionary Reformed Presbyterians, kept alive particular facets of personal covenanting into the nineteenth century.¹²¹

Personal covenanting incorporated a dual meaning. Objectively, it was intended as an act of *profession* of faith. Subjectively, it was an *expression* of thanksgiving and a resignation to pursue holiness. It was both a confirmation of one’s conversion and a personal resolve to carry out a life of holiness, or various ‘duties’ of the Christian faith. Allan Buchanan (d.1749), the parish minister of Inverkeithing in Fife,¹²² claimed that the practice was so vital to piety that ‘The man that has truly and successfully been engaged in personal covenanting, and self-dedication to God, his soul will be exercised in breathing after God’.¹²³

John Willison viewed personal covenanting partly as a convert’s profession of faith. He stated in his *Catechism* that the ‘Nature of Faith’ itself, which was required of humanity, ‘implies Covenanting with God.’ Willison elaborated, ‘For Faith is the uniting Grace, and carries in it not only as an Assent of the Understanding, but also the Consent of the Will to embrace God’s offer of Salvation thro’ Christ, and accept of Christ on his own Terms, both as our Saviour and Ruler...’¹²⁴ Ralph Erskine carefully clarified the ‘Difference betwixt God’s Covenant of Grace, and our Covenant of Duties. Our Covenant of Duties is either private and personal, or publick and national’. He then affirmed that ‘personal

¹¹⁹ Archibald Mason, *Observations of the Public Covenants, Betwixt God and the Church* (Glasgow: E. Miller, 1799), 22.

¹²⁰ [Robert Lang?] L. W., *Father’s Catechism...Better Understanding the Assembly’s Catechism* (Glasgow: James Duncan, 1726), 18-19.

¹²¹ John Cunningham, *The Ordinance of Covenanting* (Glasgow: William Marshall, 1843), Thomas Houston, *Memorial of Covenanting* (Paisley: Alex. Gardener, 1857), Mason, *Observations*.

¹²² Mackelvie, *Annals*, 180, noted how Buchanan died young, and by 1753 the majority of his congregation joined the Burgher Synod.

¹²³ Allan Buchanan, *Sermons on Interesting Subjects* (Edinburgh: George Caw, 1791), Sermon XXXVIII, 296.

¹²⁴ Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, 125.

covenanting...either meant believing at first, and laying Hold on God's Covenant, or the Believer's engaging, through Grace, to serve the Lord, in all the Duties of Religion; It is indeed the Duty and Honour of every person, to be thus engaged'.¹²⁵ John Brown also saw personal covenanting as a profession of faith. Yet, Brown connected the doctrine of assurance with the practice.

By this assured faith, we unite with Christ, as the Fulfiller of the condition of the covenant in our stead,—and as the faithful Administrator of the covenant for our good;—and, as guilty and polluted, we heartily surrender ourselves to him, as the almighty Saviour,—as poor and empty, to him, as our infinitely benevolent Friend, and all-supplying, satisfying Portion;—and as perverse and unprofitable to him, as our wise and gracious Lord, who can form us for himself to shew forth his praise...This may be called personal covenanting with God.¹²⁶

The Antiburgher minister John Young, as late as 1778, called 'covenanting with God' 'an exercise of faith' to employ the biblical language of 'The Lord is my God'.¹²⁷ Young also made it clear that personal covenanting was a public profession of faith. 'Our manner of entering into God's Covenant', he surmised, 'ought to correspond to that manner which he offers it to us in this circumstance, That, whereas God makes his proposals openly...and is not ashamed, either to call himself our God, or to be so called by us: so it is our duty to enter into God's Covenant in the most public and explicit manner...'¹²⁸ In 1789, another Antiburgher, James Morison still maintained the view that 'All genuine believers are covenanters' by profession. Morison also defined 'covenanting in general' as 'a person or people's devoting themselves to the Lord.' He thusly affirmed the practice's two aspects of profession and expression when he further 'defined' personal covenanting 'as when only one person devotes himself to the Lord' and is a 'bounden duty' 'as it is our unquestionable duty to be the Lord's'.¹²⁹ Archibald Mason also mentioned the practice's vital connection of piety. So important was the practice 'betwixt God and the soul' that it 'tend[ed] greatly to promote the exercise of true religion in the heart, and contribute much to the Christian's

¹²⁵ Erskine, *People's Covenant*, 49.

¹²⁶ John Brown, *A Compendius View of Natural and Revealed Religion*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Murray & Cochrane, 1796), 243.

¹²⁷ Young, *Evangelical Covenanting*, 8, 10.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹²⁹ James Morison, *Present Work of Covenanting...A Catechism* (Edinburgh: Neill&Co., 1789), 12,13,20.

enjoying and comfort of it'.¹³⁰ Personal covenanting was mostly associated with a Christian's quest of holiness, or the expression for an inward reality of gratified devotion.

Alexander Hamilton placed much emphasis on clarifying the practice. He claimed the long heritage of the practice was commended by 'our practical Divines and Ministers of the Gospel' and that they

so much urge upon the Lord's people, as their Duty in a special manner; and which in itself, but especially in the conscientious Performance thereof, is to be classed among these good Works, which our *Westminster* Divines of Glorious Memory, affirm to be the Fruits and Evidence of a true and lively Faith, whereby Believer's manifest their thankfulness, Strengthen their Assurance, Edify their Brethren, Adorn the Profession of the Gospel, stop the Mouths of Adversaries, and glorify their God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto, that having their Fruit unto Holiness, they may have the End Eternal Life.'¹³¹

Entering all other covenants, those of duty, concluded the original Seceder Alexander Moncrieff, 'are in consequence of...taking hold of his [God's] Covenant of Grace and Promise'.¹³² Nearly twenty years later, Moncrieff's son William (also an Antiburgher)

argued his Father's position that personal covenanting meant 'renouncing the holding of the covenant of works, taking hold by faith of God's covenant of Promise, and in the faith thereof devoting themselves to the Lord in a covenant of duty'.¹³³ Allan Buchanan described the practice as a vital aid in developing true piety. The practice aimed at helping the Christian identify deep-rooted sin, or what he termed 'defilement of thy soul'.

'Personal covenanting...supposes the man saying, *What have I to do with idols, &c.* There is a declared war against God's enemies by the child of God—*Other lords have had dominion over us, but now will we only make mention of thy name.* You may see, therefore, whether you have been sincere in this matter, by communing with your hearts on these particulars: First, He who has, in truth and righteousness, laid hold on God's covenant, is troubled at his sins, because God is wronged by them—*Against thee, thee only have I sinned...* The sorrows of hypocrites are from fear of wrath, his from filial love—this shows a truly childlike spirit. When one who has made mention of the name of God reflects on himself, sees how his heart has departed—vows been broken—God's authority insulted and despised by *him*, a sworn servant of the Most High, then he reflects on himself, as guilty of the grossest sacrilege—it was robbing God of his due; it was setting idols in his throne; it was calling him a hard master! These views of sin fill him with remorse...If there is a sense, or hope of pardon, this takes away fears, but quickens his sorrow, and makes his tears flow the faster.

¹³⁰ Mason, *Observations*, 101.

¹³¹ Hamilton, *Catechism*, 19.

¹³² Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, 8.

¹³³ William Moncrieff, *Observations on a Pamphlet Intituled, and Essay on National Covenanting* (Edinburgh: David Paterson, 1766), 2.

What Buchanan envisioned for his congregation was ‘sorrowing after godliness’. He wanted ‘every saint’ to possess an ‘earnest desire’ to be ‘engaged in wrestling against, and mortifying...sin, in the strength of grace.’ He then exhorted ‘the greatest part of the congregation’, and pleaded ‘Let me call on all who are strangers to God, and to the covenant of promise, now, at last, to draw nigh, and subscribe with their hearts and hand to God’. Finally, he exhorted the other group present in the congregation, saying ‘you who can with pleasure reflect on these solemn-transactions betwixt God and your souls, often [should] renew them. These bonds, my dear Brethren, are light—to remember them is delightful—to act them, and feel them over again...is joy unspeakable!’ Buchanan’s confidence in the practice was such that he even asserted that it was the ‘language’ that ‘Christ delights to hear—it has in it something divine, and smelling strong of heaven. It is the way to break the power of your sins—to revive or strengthen your spirits when drooping—it is the way to stir up in you the exercise of every grace, by bringing you near the great fountain of it...’¹³⁴

Thus, the practice included strong revivalistic notions.

Adam Gib defined the practice as a Christian’s ‘devoting himself to the LORD as his God’ whereby the ‘conscience [was] purged from guilt and pacified, by faith’s application of the blood of Christ’. The Christian’s ‘soul’ was ‘at rest in God, according to the New Covenant, about all...spiritual and everlasting concerns; and his heart under a sweet constraint of Christ’s love to him;—with a fire of love and gratitude in his heart to Christ taking effect in a gracious engagement for living unto him. And perhaps, for guarding against every Old-Covenant way of it,—personal covenanting may be more properly reduced to pourings out of the heart before God in prayer’.¹³⁵ Hence, Gib saw the practice as integral to Christian sanctification, but not as a contract of faith. Doubtless, he saw its grave potential for incorporating some element of legalism.

¹³⁴ Buchanan, *Sermons*, Sermon XXXVIII 303-308.

¹³⁵ Gib, *Kaina Kai Palaia*, 117.

Personal Covenanting was an extra-ordinary act of adherence to God's gracious covenant. It was intimate, yet solemn. It encompassed a definitive exercise of acquiescence to the Divine covenantal program of redemption in such a way that Christians comprehensively applied it to their lives. It was not mere heart consent, but a significant acquiescence to God in Christ in a life of piety. In this way, it was a solemn act encompassing the acknowledgment of one's need of the covenant of grace in all aspects of the Christian life.¹³⁶ This can be seen in A.R. MacEwan's account of Ebenezer Erskine's personal covenant:

Lord, if I have done iniquity, I am resolved through Thy grace to do so no more. I flee for shelter to the blood of Jesus and His everlasting righteousness; for this is pleasing unto Thee. I offer myself up, soul and body, unto God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. I offer myself unto Christ the Lord, as an object proper for all His offices to be exercised upon...I will live to Him; I will die to Him; I will quit with all I have in the world for His cause and truth... Lord, upon these terms, I renew my covenant this night... And upon these terms I subscribe myself...¹³⁷

As an important ritual of piety, personal covenants were often written down for later reflection. As a result written covenants represent an important genre of eighteenth-century piety, doubtlessly carried over from the seventeenth century. Written covenants enabled Christians to devote themselves to a life of piety. A personal covenant could even describe a minister's calling into pastoral ministry.¹³⁸ The emphasis ministers placed on the practice meant that written covenants were not uncommon among the laity.¹³⁹ The seriousness of covenanting with God in written form was demonstrated by Adam Gib, who, according to David Forrester, signed a personal covenant in his own blood.¹⁴⁰ But the seriousness of the

¹³⁶ Reverend A.H, *Personal Covenanting*, p. 101-109.

¹³⁷ MacEwan, *The Erskines*, 33.

¹³⁸ John Eadie James Harper, and William Lindsay, *Lives of Ebenezer Erskine, William Wilson, and Thomas Gillespie, Fathers of the United Presbyterian Church* (Edinburgh: Fullerton & Co., 1849).

¹³⁹ A minister alluded to this in a sermon, *A Word in Season* (Edinburgh: Robert Brown, 1714), 21. Anne Stewart renewed a personal covenant from year to year according to notes preserved in *Selections from the Family Papers Preserved at Caldwell*, vol. 1 (Glasgow: Maitland Club, 1854), 256-258. See also, Mary Somervell, *Clear and Remarkable Display of the Condescension, Love and Faithfulness of God...* (Glasgow: Robert and Thomas Duncan, 1770). A handwritten MSS but detailed explanation of how one should go about personally covenanting with God can be seen from Reverend A.H, *Personal Covenanting*, p. 102-109.

¹⁴⁰ Forrester, 'Gib': 144.

exercise was not at issue. The development of the practice into a 'legal' graceless ritual left some with reservations about its viability.

Warnings

What personal covenanting actually entailed, namely faith and commitment, became difficult to decipher at times. There was fear that the practice of personal covenanting would lead to imposing a condition upon faith. This is evidenced sharply by the Post-Revolution theologian Thomas Halyburton. He warned,

I fear, personal covenanting, however good and justifiable in itself, yet is far mistaken, and much abus'd by some, while 'tis made a Ground of Hope by some who never understood what Conversion means, never were humbled, and taken off their own Bottom, and engag'd to the LORD by the Power of his Grace. If any Man think this an easy Matter to call Christ, Lord, he has very yet done it to purpose.¹⁴¹

Alexander Hamilton, seeing the practice within the context of confessional orthodoxy, noted some hesitancy as to what the 'Divines' called 'Believing'. He claimed the practice was legitimate as long as it was connected directly to the covenant of grace.¹⁴² Hamilton also noted that some confusion existed concerning closing with Christ by way of the Covenant of Grace and the practice of personal covenanting.

I readily grant our closing with a *Covenant of Grace*, by Faith, to be a personal Act, and that it moreover infers our Duty of personal covenanting, or Promising Duties to God, as being under a special Obligation thereto; Yet, as this Acceptance of God's Covenant of Grace by Faith, cannot in my Opinion be called in a proper and strict Sense our Covenanting with God, as hath been insinuated.

Thus, what Hamilton worked to clarify for his readers was that covenanting embraced profession of faith while being more of an expression of commitment. He went on to state 'what Covenanting really is, or ought to be'. 'It supposeth a People already under the Bond of a *Covenant of Grace*.'¹⁴³ Thomas Boston solemnly vowed 'that he will be a servant to Christ, as long as he lives, if he will save his soul'. 'He made a personal covenant with Christ, resigning himself to him on these terms.' Boston warned, however, that 'This kind of covenant is men's own covenant, devised of their own heart; not God's covenant, revealed in

¹⁴¹ Thomas Halyburton, *The Great Concern of Salvation* (Edinburgh: Davidson and Paton, 1721), 429.

¹⁴² Hamilton, *Catechism*, Preface 16.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, Preface, 17, 18.

the gospel of his grace: and the making of it is nothing else but the making of a covenant of works with Christ, confounding the law and the Gospel; a covenant he will never subscribe to, though we should sign it with our hearts blood.’¹⁴⁴ Ryken pointed out that Boston was not ‘opposing the making of personal covenants *per se*’, since he signed such covenants himself and encouraged his parishioners to do the same. ‘What Boston is opposing is any kind of language that confuses covenanters that the covenant of grace has a conditional element.’ Boston taught, according to Ryken, that ‘Christ alone performs the condition of the covenant of grace’.¹⁴⁵ Kenneth Roxburgh has observed that Alexander Webster and Thomas Gillespie ‘were the two editors who were most diligent in weeding out any material which would have backed up the criticisms of the Seceders or brought ridicule on the revival’ at Cambuslang. Roxburgh concluded that ‘One area of theology which Gillespie routinely marked for omission was that of personal covenanting. From his editorial comments and suggested alterations, it is apparent that Gillespie was concerned over Arminianism.’ Roxburgh also noted that Gillespie was ‘trying to make the distinction between legal and evangelical repentance which was the issue which sparked off the *Marrow of Modern Divinity* controversy’.¹⁴⁶ In 1767 the Seceder James Morison confirmed the practical use of the exercise when he commended ‘T. Boston’s’ ‘truly evangelical directions for its ‘right performance’.¹⁴⁷ Alexander Moncrieff warned,

we are not to put our personal Covenanting, or National Covenants, in the Room of the Covenant of Grace; personal Covenanting and national Covenanting are of the same Nature and Kind, and differ only, as the one is transacted by Persons singly and separately considered, and the other by many Persons jointly in a Body: But many mismanage personal Covenanting, and likewise national Covenanting; for too many apprehend, that God, in the Word, declares himself willing to be our God upon certain Terms or Conditions to be performed by us, different from believing the free Promise of the Gospel with Application to ourselves; and therefore they do accordingly make a Covenant with God, taking him for their God upon these Terms...this is to confound and mingle the Covenant of Grace and our Covenant of Duty together—as if they were the same...¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Boston, *A True Description of Conversion...* (Edinburgh: 1742), 16.

¹⁴⁵ Ryken, *Fourfold State*, 199-200.

¹⁴⁶ Roxburgh, *Gillespie*, 51-53.

¹⁴⁷ James Morison, *An Attempt to Vindicate, Explain and Enforce...the Important Duty of Renewing Our Covenants* ([n.a.], 1767), 13.

¹⁴⁸ Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, 31-32.

James Morison remained just as adamant, declaring that personal covenanting is ‘done wrong’ whenever one sets about it, in order to pacify his conscience; imagining, that if he can make a covenant with God, to abstain from those sins he has been heretofore guilty of, and to perform those duties he has hitherto neglected, and keep it—all must be well with him’. The ‘evil of this’, according to Morison, ‘is nothing other or better than a going about to establish his own righteousness, so as not to be under a necessity of submitting to the righteousness of Jesus.’ It ‘is done aright’ when one, ‘in the exercise of faith, sees that the forgiveness of his sins and eternal life is secured to him by God’s promise, on the ground of Christ’s finished work on the cross, independent of all that he ever can be or do—and is thereby influenced, from love and gratitude to say...Oh Lord, truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant: Thou hast loosed by bonds’.¹⁴⁹

However, Adam Gib was hesitant to place too much emphasis on ‘a written or subscribed deed’. He defined personal covenanting as a ‘taking hold of God’s Covenant of Grace and vowing universal obedience to him’. ‘Nor doth this mean anything more, than a formal expression of that engagement to God, in a dependence upon his Covenant of Grace,—which belongs to the exercise of saving faith.’ Gib’s argument was that covenanting should not be a mere formality, or legalistic ritual. Rather, it should be a matter of heartfelt sincerity unto the Lord. He claimed that ‘personal covenanting is often, if not mostly mismanaged: And various forms of such a personal covenant have been proposed by different writers, of a tendency to mislead Christians,—as to their method of dealing with God about their souls’. The practice done in the wrong way, he insisted, became ‘some sort of attempt to repair the breach of the Covenant of Works...going about, however speciously, to establish the person’s own righteousness. Hence, the convert should ‘[guard] against every old covenant way.’¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Morison, *Covenanting Catechism*, 12-13.

¹⁵⁰ Gib, *Kaina Kai Palaia*, 116-117.

J.B. Torrance implied that after the *Marrow*, a legalism existed among ‘orthodox evangelicals’, who were ‘preoccupied with personal covenanting’.¹⁵¹ This hardly seems to be the case. Ministers who advocated covenanting as an important feature of Presbyterian piety were obviously aware of its potential danger of becoming legalistic, or even cheapening God’s gracious covenant activity of redemption. This is evident from the Secession Church’s statement that ‘There are therefore sundry *legal Ends*, that should be carefully avoided, whether in our *Covenanting*, or in any other Acts of Obedience...’¹⁵² It is clear that ‘orthodox evangelicals’ affirmed the practice as an important feature of their piety, but remained stoutly critical of any form of legalism arising from its use.

Personal covenanting was an attempt at a fully-developed outworking of federal theology. The practice demonstrated how the covenant idea manifested itself within personal piety. Few seemed to have any trouble with covenanting being used as an aid in promoting piety. But there was a reluctance to affirm the exercise as anything more than an outward expression of faith. Most saw the practice as a devotional expression of commitment. It reminded Christians of their experience of faith for purposes of assurance of salvation and encouraged commitments to a deeper spiritual life. However, a gradual amelioration of the language of personal covenanting took place by the mid-eighteenth century. Personal covenanting began to be seen more as a solemn commitment to personal holiness. It still utilized the covenanting language of old, but it was used less to describe the act of profession of faith. Nevertheless, the practice of covenanting did not cease.¹⁵³ By the century’s end, as we will see in the next chapter, it encompassed more of a social commitment and adherence to the principles of what were believed to be the ‘Principles of the Covenanted Reformation’.¹⁵⁴ More importantly, personal covenanting formed a foundational element of

¹⁵¹ Torrance, ‘Covenant or Contract?’ 74.

¹⁵² *ACDG*, 73.

¹⁵³ Black, *Directory*.

¹⁵⁴ Cunningham, *Covenanting*, Houston, *Memorial of Covenanting*, Samuel Simms, *Covenanters Catechism...* (Paisley: Alex. Gardiner, 1852).

a rigorous form of piety that had social and national implications for individuals and churches in the reviving of spirituality. This was the integral feature of the Seceder and Reformed Presbyterians' commitments to Scotland's covenanted engagements.

Conclusion

The covenant transaction provided a structure for understanding Divine sovereignty and human responsibility in salvation. What appear as hair-splitting discussions surrounding the *Marrow* controversy were attempts to maintain this delicate balance within confessional orthodoxy. Federal theology was fraught with complexities. Still, the effect of the controversy for Scottish evangelicals was the re-calcification of classic federal theology which understood the covenant of grace solely as a Divinely established relationship. The covenant of grace was monopoleuric in its administration and dipoleuric in its application. It manifested itself in a comprehensive way—inherently affecting the language of faith and establishing ideals of commitment—as it was applied to personal piety. The often-employed biblical theme 'I will be your God and you will be my people' was for evangelical Presbyterians the most dynamic framework for articulating faith and piety. Even with such emphases on a monopoleuric, absolute administration of the covenant of grace, evangelicals still maintained that the covenant idea included mutual obligations of faithfulness and devotion. However, the dipoleuric dimension neither counteracted nor supplanted the monopoleuric dimension. By underscoring the participatory tension found within the biblical conception of the covenant relationship itself, ministers utilized the dipoleuric, or bilateral, dimension of covenant to stimulate piety. This made personal covenanting an intimate expression of piety. It was a solemn engagement, not only to embrace the promise of salvation in Christ, but also to submit oneself entirely to a life of holiness and dutiful service. It was from this understanding of the Divine-human relationship that evangelicals diligently endeavoured to maintain doctrinal purity, avoiding what they deemed to be legalism and heterodoxy. As the Seceders and Reformed Presbyterians sought to remain faithful to an

abiding spiritual heritage, their covenantal understanding of God's salvation of the elect and the implications which it would have on individual, ecclesiastical, and national piety continually would need to be re-articulated and clarified. The emphasis on the covenant of grace also undergirded their aspirations at renewing interests in their nation's spiritual revival. However, the dipleuric dimension of that covenant would have an even greater effect on re-invigorating the corporate ramifications of federal theology within the Secession and Reformed Presbyterian Churches, as we will see in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

COVENANT OBLIGATIONS: THE PURSUIT OF HOLINESS

Covenanting was more than a seventeenth-century political aberration. It had a complex theological background rooted in federal theology. While the covenant idea stretched beyond individualistic dimensions of salvation, it had crucial implications for the doctrine of the Christian life (sanctification) that drew together individual and corporate dimensions of piety. Like personal covenanting, corporate covenanting was a dynamic application of Scotland's federal theology. Its rudiments derived from a providential view of history and the perceived continuity between biblical Israel and the contemporary Church. This view also included Scotland as a covenantal participant, which in turn, highlighted a specific understanding of Divine law. The legal constitution for biblical Israel,¹ the moral law served a similar role within Scottish covenant piety.² These interpretive emphases upheld a fundamental tenet of covenanting known as the 'principle' of 'perpetual obligation'.³ 'Perpetual obligation' meant that Scotland's Covenants bound successive generations of Scots as if they had subscribed to the confessional documents themselves, even if they were ignorant or aversive to such religious commitments.⁴ This theological principle was a fundamental tenant of the 'United Societies' and remained so for the Seceders and the Reformed Presbyterians throughout the century. With an emphasis on obedience to the moral law, covenantal obligations gave meaning to personal and corporate holiness.

¹ Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 294.

² McKay, *Ecclesiastical*, 31-35.

³ See Chapter 2.

⁴ Some sources describe this as 'descending obligation'. *Covenant Renewal...Douglas, 1712*, 35. John Glas, *Narrative of the Rise and Progress of the Controversy About the National Covenants* (Edinburgh: 1728), 58,66, Wilson, *A Defence of the Reformation-Principles of the Church of Scotland...* 271, *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 81, *Reformed Presbytery, Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 159.

The *Marrow* controversy had precipitous effects for Scotland's preservation of federal theology throughout the eighteenth century and for prolonging the covenanting ethos. Since federal theology was a tight system of doctrine, an emphasis on one aspect naturally evoked questions in others. Stemming from multiple concerns over the conditionality of the covenant of grace, the controversy in turn unearthed other contentious theological corollaries. As we saw in the previous chapter, which focused on the monopleuric, unconditional dimension of the covenant relationship and concerns over legalism and antinomianism, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1720 and the Seceders by the 1740s were forced to articulate positions on Christian holiness. The *Marrow*'s adherents highly esteemed seventeenth-century federal theology and their Covenanting ancestors' courageous spirituality which they believed were necessary to advance Scotland's revival. The *Marrow*'s emphases became catalytic in stirring renewed interests in a Covenant piety.

In trying to preserve Scotland's identity as a Covenant people, the Seceders needed to articulate their positions on individual and corporate holiness clearly. The Associate Presbytery's renewed adherence to federal Calvinism's corporate applications rejuvenated old interests in a theologically purified national Church, the moral law's implications for society, and the doctrinal insistence that a civil magistrate ought to be involved in religious matters. Covenanting piety rested in federal theology's correlation of law and covenant and in a significant interpretive emphasis on the biblical covenant at Sinai.

In light of the *Marrow* doctrine, the Post-Revolution Church, the Seceders, and Reformed Presbytery's complex fascination with the Sinaitic covenant (Mosaic law) and Christian holiness throughout the eighteenth century needs to be revisited. That is the intention of this chapter.

Adhering to classic federal theology, the Seceders and Reformed Presbyterians remained convinced that a corporate covenant idea had not expired with the arrival of the 'new covenant' in 'New Testament times'.⁵ Their elaborate proof-texting, even from the New Testament, aided in bolstering covenanting's validity.⁶ Fundamentally, both groups believed that the covenant idea's corporate dimension was a robustly biblical commitment to holiness. This was the dipleuric/mutual implication of the covenant idea which entailed obligations of fidelity to God. The Antiburgher John Young communicated this idea in a sermon:

The sum and substance of the Covenant, as it is exhibited to us in the gospel, is expressed in that cardinal promise: I will be their God, and they shall be my People (Heb 8.10). Now it is manifest, that the promise consists of two parts: and the believer consents to both; saying, as the Church, He is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand (Psal.xcv.7). Thus all the saints of God consent, not only that God should be their God, and should always deal with them according to that relation; but also that they should be his people, and should still walk before him as becomes that character, in the beauty of holiness. And this consent to be his, and to behave as his people, must surely include an engagement that, through his grace, it shall be so.⁷

Those who had entered into God's covenant could not neglect this call to obedience.

Christian allegiance was thought to be displayed through a steadfast pursuit of holiness.

Young assumed that 'The promise of the Covenant' of grace, also 'secures us holiness, as well as happiness...' because 'the two are inseparable in the nature of things'. 'When, therefore, we give our consent to the covenant of grace, we must needs consent to be holy in heart and life, and in all manner of conversation; as well as to be completely happy...that God should make us so, according to what is promised in the Covenant.' Thus, Young concluded, 'a consent that God should make us holy' must 'include a resolution, through his grace, to be holy'.⁸ Holiness was developed within covenantal parameters. The practice of corporate covenanting was the Church's thankful response of obedience to God's gracious

⁵ Mason, *Observations*, 10, Moncrieff, *Observations*, 3,14, Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 13.

⁶ Several even cite the Macedonian Church utilized the practice in 2 Cor.8.5. Brown, *Compendius View*, 527, Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, 87, John Muirhead, *Dissertations on Foederal Transactions between God and His Church* (Kelso: James Palmer, 1782), 415. Muirhead also asserted that the 'Church of Ephesus was a covenanted church...if not all the Apostolic Churches', 561-562.

⁷ Young, *Evangelical Covenanting*, 16. See also Erskine, *Covenanting Work*, 223.

⁸ Young, *Evangelical Covenanting*, 16.

covenant. It was an undertaking to be 'the people of God' by actively observing the moral law. Not surprisingly, then, covenanting was understood as a binding act.⁹

The covenant of grace was monopleuric, or unilaterally administered by God. However, its dipleuric, or mutual dimension consisted of Christian duties. These 'widely different' dimensions of the covenant of grace were thought to correspond within eighteenth-century federal theology.¹⁰ Ralph Erskine observed in his famous sermon on covenanting that 'God's covenant of grace is a thing quite distinct from, and yet the ground and foundation of our covenant of gratitude and duty towards him'.¹¹ James Morison described 'The covenant of grace' as the Christian's 'authentic charter for the heavenly inheritance' and the 'covenant of duty' as the 'obligation to pay...gratitude and thanksgiving, for such inestimable favour'. This made 'the covenant of grace, as it were, *the cause* moving us to a covenant of duty, as *the effect*'.¹²

Many believed that continuity between the biblical covenants formed the interpretive link for understanding how the moral law applied to individual Christians. Many Presbyterians maintained that while some biblical covenants were non-salvific in nature, they maintained continuity with the unfolding of the covenant of grace. They served as models for holy living. Such covenants were representative of those that biblical saints and/or the nation of Israel made in response to God's covenant of grace.¹³ This emphasis on covenant continuity influenced how evangelicals conceptualized individual, corporate and national holiness, and provided credence to the idea that covenanting was an 'ordinance of worship' or 'ordinance

⁹ Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, 81ff.

¹⁰ Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 152.

¹¹ Erskine, *Covenanting Work*, 220-221.

¹² Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 152.

¹³ This is evidenced by many ministers referencing biblical saints and the nation of Israel from Deut. 26.16-19; 29.9-13; Josh. 24.24-25; 2 Kings 11.17; 2 Chron.34.31-33; 15:10-15; 29.10; Ezra 10.3-5; Nehemiah 9.38; 10.29-31; Jeremiah 50.4-5. See for example: Glas, *Narrative*, Erskine, *Covenanting Work*, Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, Moncrieff, *Observations*, Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, Young, *Evangelical Covenanting*, Mason, *Observations*, Black, *Directory*, Alexander Allan, *View of Religious Covenanting...* (Edinburgh: Pillans & Son, 1810).

of Christ'.¹⁴ Evangelicals maintained the '*foundation and ground*' 'of their covenant of duty, and the grand encouragement they had to enter into it' was '*God's covenant of grace and promise*'.¹⁵

An important theological connection was how eighteenth-century Scottish federal theology understood obedience to the moral law.¹⁶ This encompassed detailed exegetical and theological interpretations of the biblical covenant with Moses at Mount Sinai and how it harmonized with the federal system. In other words, was the Sinaitic covenant a covenant of works or of grace, or both? The moral law (assumed from creation) was foundational for a covenant of works, but the Sinaitic covenant was significant for understanding corporate notions of mutual obligations demanded by the covenantal relationship. This was important for understanding how 'The National-Covenants' were thought to be 'perpetually binding' on Scotland and the Scottish Church's identification with Israel. By mid-century the Antiburgher minister in Norham, England, James Morison (1732-1824), had become a prolific writer and defender of covenanting piety. Morison argued that the 'national-covenants' were binding 'in a twofold respect: In respect of the matter sworn unto, as being indispensably required in the moral law; and in respect of the oath of God, which must be of perpetual obligation... as national vows' 'voluntarily' 'sworn by persons of all rank' in 'Scotland'. For this reason, 'No human authority' could 'dissolve the obligation of an oath made to God.—He to whom a promise is made, has a right to insist upon the performance of

¹⁴ John Anderson, *Essays on Various Subjects Relative to the Present State of Religion...* (Glasgow: John Bryce, 1782), 46-47. Mason, *Observations*, 29, 58. Black, *Directory*, 56. This is a theme that will be developed in the chapter 5.

¹⁵ Erskine, *Covenanting Work*, 221.

¹⁶ A good survey of Scotland's seventeenth-century federal theology and covenanting has yet to appear. Only Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism*, has attempted to describe the theological foundations of the seventeenth-century covenanting tradition. Even more helpful is his, *Protestant Piety in Early-Modern Scotland: Letters, Lives, and Covenants, 1650-1712*, vol. 14 (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 2005). However, Mullan's studies do not elaborate at length on federal theology.

it'.¹⁷ 'Oaths and vows' were also an important feature of Scotland's federal theology and Covenant obligations.¹⁸

Law and Covenant within Eighteenth-century Scots Theology

The relationship between law and covenant was a fundamental issue in the Post-Revolution period. The identification of the law revealed under the covenant of works, through both the law of nature (Eden) and the Mosaic law, and the law revealed within the covenant of grace, formed the foundation of eighteenth-century covenanting.¹⁹ As such, covenanting was argued to be a 'moral obligation' grounded in Divine law. 'The law of God 'warranted' the constitution of the obligation of lawful covenants to duty; and when it is constituted requires the fulfilment thereof; and enforces the same with a divine sanction of rewards, in case of fulfilment, and of punishment, in case of breach.'²⁰ This remained *the* primary biblical and confessional argument for the practice of covenanting until its demise.²¹

The moral law was understood to have been manifested first in creation and subsequently revealed with greater clarity to Israel at Sinai after humanity's fall.²² The *Confession* stated 'Of Creation' that God had fashioned humanity 'with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after His own image; having the law of

¹⁷ Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 62, 67-69, 71. This was argument of Moncrieff, *Covenanting*. Erskine, *Covenanting Work*, 222-223, works these ideas out in a sermon before the Seceder's momentous ceremony of covenant renewal in 1743.

¹⁸ 'Oaths and Vows' will be discussed later in the chapter.

¹⁹ Muller has pointed out that this connection was not entirely foreign to Calvin. It was more fully developed in the Post-Reformation period, particularly by Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus Brakel. Muller, *After Calvin*, 181-189.

²⁰ Brown, *Historical Account*, 9-10.

²¹ A foundational theological treatise on covenanting, that carefully connected the practice with the moral law, was known to be Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, 13. Others would follow Moncrieff's theological acumen with greater biblical-theological erudition on the practice's 'moral obligation' into the nineteenth century. See Mason, *Observations*, 11-12. Black, *Directory*, 27. Allan, *Religious Covenanting*, 160. Reformed Presbyterians insisted on the 'moral obligation' with greater intensity, even issuing public statements in the nineteenth century on the subject. See Reformed Presbyterian, *Pastoral Address on the Subject of Covenanting, by a Committee of the Reformed Presbyterian Synod to the Members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church* ([1820?]). Some notable mid-nineteenth-century works of the Reformed Presbyterian's featured the same arguments for 'moral obligation'. See Cunningham, *Covenanting*, Houston, *Memorial of Covenanting*, Simms, *Covenanter's Catechism*.

²² WCF, 4.1-2., 6.6, 19.1-2,5.

God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it'.²³ According to Thomas Boston, God 'created' and 'endued' humanity with '*original righteousness*' which was 'the conformity of all the faculties and powers of his soul to the *moral law*'.²⁴ 'Original righteousness' denoted 'Original Knowledge of God and his Will'. This aspect of law, 'naturally engraven' within humanity, was viewed as the chief mark of the *imago dei*.²⁵ The *Confession* added that prelapsarian humanity was 'endued with the power and ability to keep' the law in this form.²⁶ According to John Willison's *Catechism*, 'Adam' was 'created' and enabled 'with Sufficiency of Power and Grace...to perform GOD's whole Will'. Ministers also maintained that 'our first Parents' were given the 'Moral Law' 'for their obedience, in the Estate of Innocency'. This was 'a *general Commandment, Do this and live; and a special Commandment not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge*'.²⁷ Hence, in line with the *Confession*, early eighteenth-century evangelicals established that the moral law was an integral aspect in the prelapsarian Divine-human relationship. This meant that the moral law was placed within the covenant of works since the law given at Sinai was the same in substance with what originally had been given to Adam.

The law bound all humanity to obedience. Every 'rational creature' was understood to be under obligation to obey the law. This obligation was constituted by the relation of creature to Creator. Since the Creator possessed the right of dominion over his creatures, humanity owed obedience to God. Thomas Boston maintained that 'there was a law, which man, as a rational creature, was subjected to in his creation'. Since 'God made man upright' according to the Bible, 'This presupposeth a law to which he was conformed in his creation'. Thus,

this law was no other than the *eternal, indispensable* law of righteousness, observed in all points by the second Adam, opposed by the carnal mind, some notions of which remain among the Pagans, who, *having not the law, are a law unto themselves*, Rom.ii.14. In a word, this law is the very same which was afterwards summed up in the *ten commandments*,

²³ Ibid., 4.2.

²⁴ Boston, *Fourfold State*, 4.

²⁵ Hamilton, *Catechism*, 20.

²⁶ *WCF*, 19.1.

²⁷ Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, 4-5.

and promulgate, on mount Sinai, to the Israelites, called by us *the moral law*; and man's righteousness consisted in conformity to this law, or rule.²⁸

According to Philip Ryken, Boston clearly 'identifies the natural law with the moral law given in the Decalogue' and that the law was the 'eternal expression of the will of God'.²⁹ Other Scottish evangelical ministers followed Boston's understanding of law. The 'Moral Law', according to one of them, "'Tis the eternal Rule of Righteousness, resulting from [our] natural Relation to God and one another.'³⁰ This view simply echoed the *Confession's* broad statement that 'God gave Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire and exact, and perpetual obedience'.³¹ This became understood as the 'covenant-form' or 'federal-form' of the law of God.³² Under the headship of Adam, law in 'covenant-form' was assumed broadly to require perfect and perpetual obedience on the part of Adam's posterity. In its covenant-form, the law promised life upon the fulfilment of its conditions, but it also threatened death for breach of those conditions. John Spalding unequivocally asserted that 'the Law as a Covenant of Works calls for perfect, personal and perpetual Obedience, and will accept no less' and that it 'lays a curse to the door and on the back for the least failour' to its demands.³³ Similarly, John Willison taught, 'Though we are all naturally married to the law or covenant of works' 'our first parents could not keep this Covenant with God' and 'lost God's image; his favour; all Communion with him' and were 'plunged' into Sin 'and fallen under the sentence of Death and sorts of Miseries, *Temporal, Spiritual and Eternal*'.³⁴ Thus, disobedience to the moral law was *the* condemnatory factor of the postlapsarian covenant relationship.

²⁸ Boston, *Fourfold State*, 4.

²⁹ Ryken, *Fourfold State*, see footnote, 90.

³⁰ Crawford, *Catechism*, 98.

³¹ *WCF*, 19.1.

³² Ralph Erskine, *Law-Death, Gospel-Life: Or the Death of Legal Righteousness, the Life of Gospel Holiness* (Edinburgh: 1724), 20, 22, 28. Brown, *Compendius View*, 201.

³³ John Spalding, *Synaxis Sacra; or, a Collection of Sermons Preached at Several Communion* (Edinburgh: Andrew Anderson, 1703), Sermons on Philippians, 18.

³⁴ Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, 9, 4-5.

With the failure of the probationary covenant of works relationship, the law continued to be viewed as binding on Adam's posterity. Moreover, the *Confession* asserted that after the fall the law 'was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables: the first four commandments our duty towards God; and the other six our duty to man'.³⁵ Both with Adam and Israel at Sinai the condition of the law as a covenant remained 'Do this and thou shall live'. This meant that for those who had not come under the covenant of grace, the law remained binding as the condition of life.³⁶ Yet the death of Christ as 'Mediator and Surety' fulfilled this covenant condition for those 'taking hold of the new covenant'.³⁷ Nevertheless, the *Confession* did not specifically designate the Mosaic covenant as the covenant of works.³⁸ Instead, the *Confession* highlighted that in the postlapsarian state there was only one covenant of grace which culminated in Christ's new covenant.³⁹ This broad designation created significant interpretive difficulties within eighteenth-century Scottish Presbyterian theology.

How Christ fulfilled the law as a covenant was not questioned. The Post-Revolution Church uniformly maintained that the 'Ceremonial Law' 'was a Symbolical, typical Service, pointing to Christ, the great atoning Sacrifice, and all the Benefits purchased by his Death.' The 'Judicial Law', although non-salvific, 'was a Constitution relating to the civil Government of the Jews' as a nation. Both the Ceremonial and Judicial forms of biblical law were understood as 'typical and imperfect' and after Christ, 'done away'.⁴⁰ The *Confession* stated that 'true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby

³⁵ WCF, 19.2.

³⁶ Hamilton, *Catechism*, 21,22, Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, 4-5.

³⁷ Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, 7. See also Chapter 3.

³⁸ This had been a point of significant debate among Reformed theologians. See the collection of articles on this subject in Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective*.

³⁹ C.f., *Larger Catechism* Q/A 33-35 in WCF.

⁴⁰ Crawford, *Catechism*, 98.

justified or condemned'.⁴¹ However, the *Confession* also states of the law's relationship to the Christian,

yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs, and binds them to walk accordingly...it is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain sin...The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof; although not as due to them by the law, as a covenant of works.⁴²

Thus, 'Neither are the [a]forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do sweetly comply with it...'⁴³ Under the covenant of grace, the Christian's relationship to the law was as a 'rule of life'. This was where the Sinaitic covenant was interpreted as paradigmatic for individual and ecclesiastical piety. But how the law functioned as 'a rule of life' for the Christian became riddled with difficulties.

Within the Post-Revolution Church some confusion apparently had existed over how the Sinaitic covenant was interpreted within the federal system of theology.⁴⁴ Richard Muller has indicated that 'It is typical of the Reformed Orthodox to raise the issue of the relationship of the Decalogue as part of the covenant of grace—with many insisting that the commandments belong to the gracious work of God, form the point of their revelation on Sinai...'⁴⁵ Was the Sinaitic covenant a reduplication of the covenant of works, or did it somehow contain the covenant of grace? How this covenant was interpreted was not only significant as the 'warrant' for the practice of covenanting, it was also crucial to the doctrine of sanctification.⁴⁶ This is illustrated by Thomas Walker (1704-1780), a Church of Scotland minister, who correlated 'the Covenant at Sinai' with eighteenth-century covenanting. He stated, 'We have the things that' [Israel] 'had engaged-to upon this occasion, and which God

⁴¹ WCF, 19.6.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 19.7.

⁴⁴ This was not an uncommon debate within the Reformed tradition, according to Michael McGiffert, 'From Moses to Adam: The Making of the Covenant of Works', *Sixteenth Century Journal* XIX (1988): where the covenant of Sinai was to be included into the federal-theological schema generated considerable debate.

⁴⁵ Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca.1520 to Ca.1725*, Second ed., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 308-309.

⁴⁶ Young, *Evangelical Covenanting*, 42-43.

desires...and that is, ‘That they would fear God, and keep his commandments always.’”

Such engagements, he explained, ‘must be entered into upon occasion of every solemn transaction with God about the salvation of our souls; and indeed it is the complete summary of our duty...’ Walker’s conclusion is illustrative of those who took seriously a practical federal theology.

That in our covenanting with God, we solemnly engage to fear him, and keep all his commandments always. This observation I found upon the recapitulation made by God of the engagements which the people [of Israel at Sinai] had entered upon this occasion...and as, in this recapitulation, [God] does not confine their own mind, but makes some addition and amendment to their protestation, rather expresses what he desires they would do, we may take this as a general rule of conduct in our covenant-transactions with God, and as intended to point out what engagements he demands of us, and what we have ground to expect will be acceptable to him on such occasions.⁴⁷

This connection between Israel’s covenanting at Sinai and Scotland’s Covenants was one that few Church of Scotland ministers would comment on after the 1733 Secession. Post-Revolution ministers had begun to move away from identifying Scotland with Israel’s commitments at Sinai. After the *Marrow* controversy it is observable that lines had been drawn. As Secession and Reformed Presbyterians endeavoured to preserve their emphasis on the absolute, unconditional nature of the gracious covenant, they also underscored the mutual dimension of covenantal obedience. This created numerous erudite discussions about the Sinaitic covenant. After 1750, Church of Scotland ministers were silent on the Sinaitic covenant and place of the law in federal theology. The *Marrow* controversy had forced the Seceders and Reformed Presbyterians (and ‘some’ Relief ministers), to (re)establish what they thought was a more consistent federal theology.⁴⁸ This would force evangelicals to define the diplueric/mutual dimension within the covenant relationship through the meticulous demarcation of the ‘covenant form of the law’ and the ‘law as rule of duty’.

Defining Obedience: Law and Covenant

More than anything else, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*’s theology, shaped the

⁴⁷ Thomas Walker, *Essays and Sermons, on Doctrinal and Practical Subjects...* (Edinburgh: Murray & Cochran, 1782), 289-291.

⁴⁸ Struthers, *Relief Church*, 319, 303-304.

eighteenth-century evangelical understanding on law and covenant. The *Marrow* controversy, fuelled by partisan accusations of both antinomianism and neonomianism,⁴⁹ also provoked disputes within the Post-Revolution Church regarding the usefulness of the law in the Christian life. The positions of the 'Marrowmen', while mostly condemned by the Church of Scotland, inevitably became benchmarks for the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians' theological stance on the law. The *Marrow's* emphasis on law also became the justification for connecting covenanting with 'evangelical obedience'.⁵⁰

The Seceders maintained that the General Assembly, by condemning the *Marrow*, failed to understand the 'Word of God' and the 'Confession of Faith and Catechisms' on the place of the law in conversion and the Christian life. The *Act Concerning the Doctrine of Grace* (ACDG) stated that the *Marrow* 'set forth in a very clear Light' 'the Difference between the Law and the Gospel, and between the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace, as also the true way of attaining Gospel-Holiness'. Along with the debate over whether or not the covenant of grace was conditional⁵¹ another considerable debate ensued. The ACDG maintained that the 1720 General Assembly had 'charge[d] an erroneous Sense upon the *Marrow*, without being able to prove it'. The General Assembly found 'fault with the marrow of asserting, that the Moral law is strictly and properly the Covenant of Works, and that, as such, the Believer is wholly and altogether set free from it'.⁵² This was another charge against the *Marrow* that James Hog had sought to refute during the controversy in 1719.⁵³ What becomes apparent in the controversy is a lack of agreement and understanding over the Sinaitic covenant's placement in the federal system and the application of the law.

⁴⁹ Lachman, *Marrow Controversy*, 486-488.

⁵⁰ ACDG, 66, 77, see also 68, 71. Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 186, 204-205.

⁵¹ See Chapter 3.

⁵² ACDG, 54, 18, 55.

⁵³ James Hog, *Explication of Passages Excepted against in the Marrow...* (Edinburgh: Robert Brown, 1719).

As the controversy unfolded, Hugh Maxwell (*circa*.1682-1751) preached a volatile sermon before the Synod of Angus and Mearns. In it, Maxwell asserted that ‘the authors of the *Marrow*’ ‘make the *Sinai* Covenant, wherein *Moses* was Mediator Typical, to be *Adam*’s Covenant of Works, renewed with the Church of *Israel* and the Covenant at *Horeb* to be distinct from that, and from the Covenant made with *Abraham*’. Maxwell also criticized ‘Their distinguishing betwixt the Law of Works, which they make the *Sinai* Moral Law to be, and the Law of Christ and of Faith’. Maxwell then set out ‘to prove’ ‘That the Law of *Moses*, and the Law of Christ, are one and the same: And, that believing Christians are subject to *Moses* Law as it was promulgated, and dispensed to the Israelites, and the old Testament church...for the same Ends and Purposes’. Maxwell still maintained that Christians ‘are not under it as a Covenant of Works, [for] justification, by perfect Obedience to it’.⁵⁴ But clearly, Maxwell had misunderstood the *Marrow*’s position. The *Marrow* distinguished between the law as applied to the reprobate (the law in federal or covenant form) and the law as applied to the Christian (the law as a rule of life or law of Christ). This was a critical distinction, not only of the *Marrow* controversy itself, but also one within the variegated federal theology throughout England and Scotland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵⁵ Therefore, Maxwell was not making the same distinction that the ‘Marrowmen’ had made on the placement of the Sinaitic covenant within federal theology. Because of this, the *ACDG* later questioned: ‘Can it be thought, that an Assembly of the Church of *Scotland* denies any Difference between the Law as a *Covenant of Works*, and the Law as a *Rule of Duty*?’⁵⁶ The General Assembly maintained ‘that the distinction of the law, as it is the law of works, and as it is the law of Christ...is altogether groundless’.⁵⁷ The *ACDG* thereby refuted the General Assembly’s ruling that the *Marrow* taught that the ‘believer is not under law as rule of life’. At stake for the Associate Presbytery (and any

⁵⁴ Maxwell, *Beauty and Purity*, ‘Contents’, no pages numbers given.

⁵⁵ Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (London: Crossgate, 1964), 110. Kevan’s study provides a thorough survey of Puritan interpretations and uses of Divine law.

⁵⁶ *ACDG*, 61.

⁵⁷ *Act V.1720, AGA*, 535-536.

adherent of the *Marrow's* theology) was a consistent federal theology that incorporated strong affirmations of grace, Christian holiness, and covenanting.⁵⁸

When the 'Assembly' viewed the law as 'a rule of life', they ostensibly understood it as applying to non-Christian and Christian alike. The law, according to the General Assembly remained in a 'covenant-form'. The Seceders were frustrated with the General Assembly because 'they assert, that the Law as a Rule of Life, which the Believer is under, is a Law that is not divested of a *Promise*, and a *Threatening of Death*... They likewise maintain, that holy Obedience is properly a *federal or conditional Mean*, and has some kind of *Causality*, in order to the obtaining of *Glory*'.⁵⁹ Thus, according to the Seceders, the General Assembly emphasized that the moral law fell under the covenant of works and applied to Christian and non-Christian the same way. The 1722 General Assembly reinforced its ruling against the *Marrow's* position on the law.⁶⁰ Like Maxwell, Thomas Blackwell opposed the *Marrow's* alleged heterodoxy. His comments on the place of the law and its relationship to the biblical covenants offer insight into the confusion that existed within Post-Revolution theological discussions. He maintained that '*Sinai...at Bottom...was a Covenant of Grace...*' This was evident, he asserted

from the Divine Institution of the ceremonial Law, after the Promulgation of the *moral*: The first Covenant of Works, allowing of no Mediator, nor Priest; of no Sacrifice nor Incense; of no Altar, nor Mercy Seat: All which were both in the Tabernacle and Temple. Yet upon most weighty Grounds...[God]...saw necessary, That this Covenant of *Grace*, should be promulgate and dispensed in a *very legal Form*'. Thus, to *impress* that obstinate *rebellious* People with great Awe and Fear...

The 'Marrowmen' abhorred any notion that gave a 'legal Form' to the covenant of grace.

Blackwell concluded his discussion on the Sinaitic covenant by stating, 'thus the *Dispensation* of the Covenant of Grace continued from *Moses to Malachy* under much of a *legal Form*; It being preach't by a *wise Mixture* of legal Sermons, pressing the moral Law with severe Threatenings upon Transgressors'. 'But when the fullness of Time was come for

⁵⁸ ACDG, 59, 74-77.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁰ Act VII, 1722, *Acts of the General Assembly*, 555.

the Church...upon our *Lord's Incarnation*, Death, Resurrection and Ascension...the Scene was wonderfully changed: God proceeding to make great *Alterations*...of the Covenant of Grace dispensing it with far more of *Love, Light, Life and Power*...' Blackwell then asserted that 'the *Terms of Life*, required on Sinners are far more, set in *Light*...than under the Old Testament. How plainly now, are the great Doctrines of *Faith, Repentance and new Obedience*, declared and opened up in the Gospel?'⁶¹ This was clearly what the 'Marrowmen' opposed most—that faith, repentance and holiness were conditions to the covenant of grace.

In a significant but anonymous pamphlet, written by one of the adversaries to the 'Marrowmen', it is easy to observe the hair-splitting discussion over the law's place within federal theology. Equally observable, is the subtle nuance regarding 'motives for obedience'.⁶²

We may indeed conceive this Difference betwixt the...Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace, with respect unto the Threatening of Death; that, in the Covenant of Works, Death was threatened against every Sin, without Hope of Relief from the Covenant: But in the Covenant of Grace, there is a Relief provided unto Believers, against the Curse threatened in the Law, and which even their Sins do deserve...I therefore humbly beseech, for the Sake of Truth, that...there is a Difference between the Law's commanding perfect Obedience, which it doth as a perfect Rule of Righteousness, and its requiring this Obedience, as the Condition of Life, which belongs to it as a Covenant of Works: That tho', by the Covenant of Works, no less than perfect Obedience could be accepted; yet the Law, as a standing Rule, now divested of that *Covenant-Form*, doth not command imperfect Obedience; but that the Law, as a Rule of Life to Believers, doth still command perfect Obedience, tho' God doth, through Christ accept and reward their imperfect, but sincere Obedience.⁶³

Doctrinally, the emphasis was placed on 'a Believer's' 'sincere' obedience. Hence, the writer concluded:

Ye will likewise, perceive, that tho' no Man, since the Fall, can claim Life in the Terms of the Covenant of Works...yet it doth not therefore follow, that the Law, as a Rule of Life, is divested of its Promises of Life and other Blessings...for encouraging Believers unto Obedience, that, having their Fruit unto Holiness, they may have the End, eternal Life.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Blackwell, *Schema Sacrum*, 252, 255-258.

⁶² *ACDG*, 52, 45ff, 71-73.

⁶³ [Anonymous], *Friendly Advice For...Preserving...Purity of Doctrine and Peace of the Church* (Edinburgh: Mosman and Company, 1722), 23-25.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

‘Proper’ motivations for ‘evangelical obedience’ for those who supported the *Marrow* doctrine were simple. The Christian, ‘should be moved to Obedience’ upon ‘Consideration of the Excellency...of God in Christ as their Inheritance...particularly...by *rich Grace, and free Promiseth...*’ ‘Gospel-obedience’ to the ‘holy Law’ would come from ‘*evangelical Motives*’. This kind of ‘Gospel-obedience’ was the ‘principal End’ for ‘the believer’s Experience and Improvement of the free Grace and Love of God’.⁶⁵ However, the pamphlet further underscored that a ‘Difference’ existed ‘between the Law’s being divested of its Threatening of Death as to Believers’ and ‘Believers being freed from the Curse threatened in the Law; and that God’s pardoning the Believer’s Sins, upon Account of Christ’s Satisfaction, doth not make void the Law, or strip it of its penal Sanction; else Believers Sins should not deserve Death from the Law, and as Transgressions of it; neither should they need to be expiated by the Blood of Christ’.⁶⁶ Hypothetically, this meant that penal sanctions were the stimulus for Christian obedience. ‘Fear’ as a ‘Motive for Obedience’ was unacceptable to the ‘Marrowmen’. Such emphases gave credence to the ‘Marrowmen’s’ disquiet that the law remained as a covenant of works for the Christian. In the eyes of the ‘Marrowmen’, this emphasized that obedience to the law was motivated by ‘slavish fear’ of punishment rather than heart-felt gratitude or ‘filial fear’.⁶⁷ The ‘Marrowmen’ thus lamented that many had begun to identify the Sinaitic/Mosaic covenant as ‘a covenant of grace’ but one that was ‘dispensed in a very *legal form*’⁶⁸ Therefore, the ‘Marrowmen’ and later the Associate Presbytery assumed it to be a logical deduction that the Mosaic covenant (and the covenant of grace) was being reformulated into a covenant of works by the majority of ministers in the General Assembly. The General Assembly concluded that the *Marrow* contained antinomian paradoxes.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ ACDG, 52, 45ff, 71-73.

⁶⁶ [Anonymous], *Friendly Advice*, 25-27.

⁶⁷ ACDG, 51, 72.

⁶⁸ Blackwell, *Schema Sacrum*, 252.

⁶⁹ *Acts of the General Assembly*, Act V 1720, Act VII 1722.

Robert Riccaltoun (1691-1769), considered to be the most 'able' commentator of the controversy,⁷⁰ emphasized the 'Assembly's' confusion and imprecision when defining terms. He also felt that such imprecision led to the view that the Sinaitic Covenant was of the covenant of works. He mentioned that the *Marrow's* leading opponent, Professor James Hadow (1670-1747), seemed to be confused, if not unorthodox, in his own views of law and covenant. He stated that 'the Reverend Principal is at a great deal of pains, to expose the Marrow' and

sets up a Notion directly contrary to this; for, having spoken of the *Law of Works*, and owned it a Scriptural Term...he goes on to tell us...That besides the *Law of Works* in the Apostle's Sense, there are divers Laws, "Such are the Moral law of Nature, established by God as he is Creator, and promulgated in the Ten Commandments, unto the Church at Mount *Sinai* and the positive Laws of God, added by Revelation, as the Commands to repent, to believe, and to persevere therein, which have Promises of Life, and Threatening of Wrath annexed." And as we had Occasion already to observe, how he teaches, *That this Law is a Rule of Judgment, whereby God justifies the Believer*...So we have here, in a direct-Opposition to the Apostle's Design, a Law given, which can give Life, and a Righteousness by the Works of the Law also, notwithstanding of all he has said to the contrary.

Obviously, Riccaltoun was not impressed with Hadow's interpretation of the law's application to the Christian. Riccaltoun's conclusion was telling: 'I hope...this Scheme of Doctrine will not yet go down in the *Church of Scotland*; and therefore, I think, the *Marrow* will be safe enough here.'⁷¹ Riccaltoun was convinced that Hadow had muddied the waters of theological dialogue on law and covenant. According to Lachman, Riccaltoun's contributions to the controversy had analyzed accurately Hadow's methodology and doctrine, even 'making it clear that the Marrow Brethren had the better argument and faulting Hadow for widening breaches rather than seeking peace' in the national Church.⁷² According to the 'Marrowmen' and their successors, the legal emphasis at work within early eighteenth-century Calvinism made the covenant relationship a means of 'works righteousness'. Hence, they interpreted the [Westminster]'Confession' as vindicating their position, and invalidating the General Assembly's position for having a 'Notion of the Law,

⁷⁰ MacLeod, *Scottish Theology*, 158.

⁷¹ Robert Riccaltoun, *A Sober Enquiry into the Grounds of the Present Differences in the Church of Scotland*. ([Edinburgh?]: 1723), 355-357.

⁷² David C. Lachman, 'Robert Riccaltoun', in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, ed. Nigel de S. Cameron (Downers Grove. IL: InterVarsity, 1993).

as a Covenant of Works'.⁷³ Thereafter, the General Assembly did little to rectify the dispute. However, many later evangelicals would adopt the *Marrow's* theology of law and covenant.⁷⁴

The *Confession* did state that while obedience to the law was no longer a condition of salvation for the Christian under the covenant of grace, it remained as the Christian's 'rule of life'. Therefore, it became vital on the one hand to demonstrate the value of the moral law as the standard of Christian living, or 'Evangelical Obedience'.⁷⁵ On the other hand, ministers had to protect against merit-oriented ['legal'] obedience. 'Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned' stated the *Confession*, 'yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs, and binds them to walk accordingly...'⁷⁶ Later adherents to the *Marrow's* theology argued that this was the foundation of covenanting.⁷⁷

The *Marrow* controversy, therefore, revitalized federal theology among evangelicals who maintained the necessity of covenanting piety by emphasizing the correlation of law and covenant.⁷⁸ Ebenezer Erskine left no question that the law given at Sinai was a manifestation of the covenant of grace and a reaffirmation of the substance of the covenant of works. He declared that 'those who imagine, that it was a covenant of works which God entered into with Israel at mount Sinai' were in 'error' and 'pervert the design of the promise and law annexed to it'. Erskine's argument was that 'if the promise had followed after the commandments of the law; and if God had said, Keep these commandments, and, upon you

⁷³ *ACDG*, 59.

⁷⁴ This was true of many Relief ministers such as Thomas Gillespie. See Roxburgh, *Gillespie*, 144-145, Struthers, *Relief Church*, 303-304.

⁷⁵ *ACDG*, 59-61, 67-74.

⁷⁶ *WCF*, 19.6.

⁷⁷ *ACDG*, 74-77.

⁷⁸ Crawford, *Catechism*, 98. Crawford elsewhere expressed some confusion over the *Marrow* controversy itself (see chapter 3). His later comments demonstrate his firm commitment toward *Marrow* doctrine.

so doing, I will be the Lord your God', then it would have been 'a pure covenant of works.' Likewise, he asserted that if Sinai was simply the republication of the covenant of works, 'whether perfect or sincere obedience had been the condition...still the reward would have been' conditional 'as in the first covenant'. However, Erskine argued that 'the order of the covenant of works, or the connection betwixt the precept and promise, as it was laid in that covenant, is now inverted: for now God first promises, in a way of sovereign grace, to be the Lord our God and Redeemer, which is the substance and sum of the new covenant'.⁷⁹

Erskine's colleague Alexander Hamilton cited the Puritan [Anthony] 'Burgess' from 'his *Vindiciae Legis*' (1646) and the 'Westminster Divines', as teaching that the 'Moral Law' 'respects both a *Covenant of Works* and a *Covenant of Grace*'. In 'respect to the Covenant of Works' it 'comprehends a Promise of Life to Adam, and in him all his natural Race, upon the Condition of *perfect, personal, and perpetual Obedience, with a threatening of Death, in case of Failzie*'. Yet, in 'respect to a *Covenant of Grace*' it 'comes both [as] a *Law and Covenant into the hands of a Redeemer*'. As a '*Covenant Law*' it was '*fulfilled* and satisfied' by Christ. Therefore, 'in the hands of Christ' 'the law' became applicable to the Christian, but in 'a subserviency to the Gospel'.⁸⁰ In this way, the law was neither a renovation of the covenant of works nor a remedial law through which Christians could offer a sincere (though imperfect) obedience in order to achieve Divine favour. James Fisher's popular *Catechism* instructed many Church of Scotland parishes and Secession churches as to whether 'the Sinai transaction' was 'in the form of the covenant of works, or in the form of the covenant of grace?' His *Catechism* taught that 'There was a *repetition* of BOTH those covenants on the solemn occasion.' Positively, 'the covenant of grace was *first* promulgated, and then the covenant of works was displayed, as subservient thereunto'. Fisher also explained how 'the

⁷⁹ Ebenezer Erskine, 'A Treasure of Gospel-Grace Digg'd out of Mount Sinai', in *The Whole Works of the Rev. Mr. Ebenezer Erskine* (Falkirk: Patrick Mair, 1791), 338.

⁸⁰ Hamilton, *Catechism*, 21,24. Anthony Burgess (d.1664) was an English nonconformist with Presbyterian leanings who served as a member of the Westminster Assembly. He indicated in his *Vindiciae Legis* (London, 1647), 229, that the Sinaitic covenant was such a debatable issue that he could 'not find in any point of divinity, [where] learned men so confused and perplexed (being like Abraham's ram, hung in a bush of briars and brambles by the head) as here.'

covenant of GRACE was *first* promulgated' in the Decalogue's preface, '*I am the Lord thy God*'. This was 'spoken to a select people, the natural seed of Abraham, as typical of his whole spiritual seed'. Therefore, Fisher taught that 'The covenant of grace was both in itself, and in God's intention the *principal part* of the Sinai-transaction'. Nevertheless, he noted, the covenant of works was the most *conspicuous* part of it, and lay most obvious to the view of the people...this was to [rid them], in some measure, from that self-confidence which they had expressed before the publication of law...and to discover the necessity of a Mediator, and of faith in him, as the sole foundation of all acceptable obedience...'⁸¹ Thus, the Post-Marrow position interpreted the Sinaitic covenant as placing the covenant of works in subservience to the covenant of grace.⁸²

The 'Marrowmen' remained eager to preserve a view of continuity among the biblical covenants. For them, the Mosaic covenant systematically belonged to the covenant of grace in light of redemptive-historical continuity. While the Mosaic covenant did reveal the covenant of works, this was only to further highlight and better 'advance and 'make effectual' the covenant of grace.⁸³ 'For indeed', asserted John Williamson, 'the Covenant of Grace was, before the coming of Christ, sealed by his Blood in Types and Figures'. 'For there were only some circumstantial Differences, in regard of Administration, betwixt their [Old Testament] Way of Salvation, or Covenant of Grace, and ours...But in regard of Substance, they were all one and the very same' Covenant of grace with 'Christ' 'and Salvation'.⁸⁴ The covenant of works was, according to Fisher, 'subservient' 'to the covenant of grace' because it directed the people of God to the gracious covenant by 'pointing out the

⁸¹ Fisher, *Shorter Catechism Explained*, 25-27.

⁸² It is significant that Carson, 'The Doctrine of the Church in the Secession', fails to note the Marrow's distinction.

⁸³ John Williamson, *Scope and Substance of the Marrow of Modern Divinity...Explained and Vindicated...* (Edinburgh: 1722), 11, 14.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 12-13. Williamson was one of the twelve 'Marrowmen' but did not support the formation of the Associate Presbytery.

necessity of Christ as the 'Surety-righteousness'.⁸⁵ The 'Marrowmen's' position was that the Sinaitic covenant carried a two-fold purpose, although it maintained solidarity with the (Abrahamic) covenant of grace. Sinai was both a republication of the covenant of works for the unregenerate and an extension of the covenant of grace for the Christian. Sinai did not re-create the covenant of works arrangement with Adam, nor did it annul the grace-oriented Abrahamic covenant. Its purpose was to spell out life within the covenant of grace for the Christian community. For those who remained outside the covenant of grace, the Sinaitic covenant served as a stark reminder to unbelievers of their disenfranchisement from God.⁸⁶

Serving as a reminder to God's people that they were a special people, the Decalogue was understood to outline the lifestyle of the covenant people. Thomas Boston highlighted the emphasis that the Decalogue was prefaced by God's condescending grace by '*I am the Lord thy God*'. Boston then elaborated that the 'Ten Commands given on Mount Sinai' were 'Not bare Exactions of Duty'. Rather he asserted, the summary of the law in the Decalogue was 'fronted with the Gospel, to be believed in the first Place'. 'If we loved [Christ] more, we would see him more in every page [of the bible], and in every Command, receiving the law at his Mouth'.⁸⁷ Fisher saw the Decalogue as 'annexed' to the covenant at Sinai's 'promulgation of the covenant of grace'. He also 'viewed' the Decalogue 'as the law of Christ, or as a rule of life, given by Christ the Mediator, unto his spiritual seed, in virtue of his having engaged to fulfil the law as a covenant in their room'.⁸⁸ What he meant was that the Decalogue's preface indicated its application within the gracious covenant. It instructed the people of God that, since they were delivered from slavery, they were to render obedience out of gratitude. Hence, 'the Law, in the Hand of Christ' 'promised' 'Grace' to

⁸⁵ Fisher, *Shorter Catechism Explained*, 26.

⁸⁶ ACDG, 59-61. See also Fisher, *Shorter Catechism Explained*, 25-28, Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, 63-64.

⁸⁷ Boston, *Sovereignty and Wisdom of God Displayed*, 49.

⁸⁸ Fisher, *Shorter Catechism Explained*, 25.

the covenant people to carry out 'Obedience'.⁸⁹ This theology became the impetus behind eighteenth-century covenanting.

Uses of Law and the Relationship to Covenanting

The systematic relationship of law and covenant within federal theology carried acute ramifications on Presbyterian piety long after the *Marrow* controversy. Typical of the Reformed tradition, the application of the law was important to the doctrine of the Christian life.⁹⁰ However, Seceders and Reformed Presbyterians remained concerned that the covenant of grace might be construed as having conditions. They frequently elucidated how the law functioned within their theology, but did so while defending covenanting.

Long after the *Marrow* controversy had ceased, Adam Gib continued the Secession's effort to preserve its doctrine of grace by highlighting the *Marrow*'s emphasis on law. Gib stated that the law 'never is nor can be divested of its Covenant-form, but unto true believers in Christ; who are blessed with a supernatural writing of it in another form upon their hearts, as they are brought to a dependence upon his fulfilling of it for them in its Covenant-form'.

Elsewhere Gib asserted that 'covenanting'

in no way interferes with the Covenant of grace; as it means not a laying any new ground of dependence and expectation before God: It only means a solemn avouching of the lord and engagement to him, upon the ground of his Covenant of Grace. And so, it is altogether different from the Covenant of Works: As the engagement unto, and performance of duties, is not any condition of obtaining life from God; but is a consequence of embracing the gift of life in the Covenant of Grace and of dependence on the promises of that Covenant.

Gib concluded, 'Salvation, as all of grace, no way supersedes,—but mightily enforces the obligation of homage to God, in all Christian duties'.⁹¹ Such emphasis illustrates the vigorous commitment in the later part of the century to see federal theology rooted in grace. It also shows how covenanting evangelicals understood the law's usefulness for Christian

⁸⁹ Erskine, *Law-Death*, 70.

⁹⁰ I.J. Hesselink, 'Law', in *Encyclopaedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. Donald J. McKim (Edinburgh: St Andrews, 1992). See also, P.D.L. Avis, 'Moses and the Magistrate: A Study in the Rise of Protestant Legalism', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 26 (1975), T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 60-63, 103-105, Kevan, *Law*, 38-44.

⁹¹ Gib, *Kaina Kai Palaia*, 107-108, 115-116.

obedience as advanced through covenanting. The Seceders especially⁹² discussed this understanding of law and covenant; the Reformed Presbyterians maintained it as well. John Brown of Haddington summarized the Post-*Marrow* and evangelical position on the law. His position likewise represented the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians' position on law and gospel. The law, he likened to 'a glass' that 'shews us' 'our sinfulness and misery, and thus our need of Christ and his salvation offered in the gospel...' It is like 'a scourge to lash our conscience with charges of guilt and threatenings of wrath, in order to drive us...to Christ alone for righteousness and salvation'. The law 'In revenging indignity done to itself, in men's obtruding upon' the law...law-magnifying obedience' is the 'declaration of God's will, which directs...all men, in every age and place' on how they ought to live. Thus, the law held sway over civil order by 'requiring nothing but what is good in itself and calculated to promote the happiness of all under it. Finally,

As a *rule of life* in the hand of Christ, the law is subservient to the gospel...As an exciter of believers, obedientially[sic] to receive more of the gracious privileges of the gospel to qualify them for more full and lively obedience to this law...As an instructing charge from Christ, to improve the abundant grace of the gospel to its honour...God's impression of it on our heart, being a blessing of the gospel, makes us relish, desire, and rest satisfied with, the other pure and spiritual blessings of it...⁹³

This position mirrored that of Calvin, who emphasized the law by distinguishing three purposes for its use. Calvin's first use of the law (*usus elencticus*) was pedagogical. 'It shows God's righteousness...it warns, informs, convicts and lastly condemns, every man of his own unrighteousness'. The second use of the law for Calvin (*usus politicus*) was civil. It was purposed at restraining sin within civil order 'at least by fear of punishment to restrain...' The law was thought to regulate the conduct of society; both for those not inwardly moved by the grace of God and for the Christian who failed to resist the power of sin. Thirdly, and what was known as the principle use of the law(*usus normativus*) 'finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns...' '[They]

⁹² Reformed Presbyterian Church, *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland: Historical and Doctrinal* (Glasgow: George Gallie, 1866), 208.

⁹³ Brown, *Compendius View*, 481-482.

have been so moved and quickened through the directing of the Spirit that they long to obey...' Thus the law had a positive purpose in both guiding Christians as to the will of God and spurring them onto holiness.⁹⁴ It was in this third use of the law that covenanting was established as a practice of piety.

Like Calvin, the Seceders and Reformed Presbyterians felt that the law through grace restored a notion of duty to the Christian life.⁹⁵ As the law was given with 'evangelical' purposes, it could only be kept through 'evangelical' obedience. 'Covenant-Duties' were understood as a Christian's obligation to holy living and as the Church's obligation to doctrinal solidarity.⁹⁶ Ebenezer Erskine preached that 'purity, holiness, and faithfulness of church-members is the glory of a church, when that motto is written upon the...walk and talk of professors'.⁹⁷ Alexander Hamilton similarly prefaced his *Catechism* but with a significant correlation—that connected the Sinaitic covenant and covenanting. He stated, the 'Covenant of Grace' 'requires in a Covenant-way...thankful obedience to all his Commands. Like 'the *Sinai Covenant*' which had offered promises for Israel's 'Encouragement' it also extended 'manifold engagements of the Lord's People to walk in his Laws, observe and do all the Commandments Statutes and Judgments'. This 'kind of Covenant' asserted Hamilton, 'our own Divines have called a Covenant of Duties'.⁹⁸ John Willison elaborated on the corporate dimension of covenant obedience. What constituted 'God's covenanted people', for Willison, was 'a humble and self-denying People' that

are a holy People, zealous of good Works: They are a thankful and God-exalting people. Jesus Christ, the Mediator and Surety of the Covenant, is very precious to them. The free Grace of the Covenant is the Matter of their Wonder and Admiration. They are inclined to perform Covenant Duties, and that in a Covenant-Way, relying on Covenant-Strength, from a

⁹⁴ J.T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles, ed., *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Reprint ed., Library of Christian Classics (London: Westminster/John Knox, 1960), II.vii.6-12.

⁹⁵ Byung-Ho Moon, *Christ the Mediator of the Law: Calvin's Christological Understanding of the Law as the Rule of Living and Life-Giving* (London: Paternoster, 2006), 256.

⁹⁶ Gib, *Kaina Kai Palaia*, 115-116. Erskine, *Covenanting Work*, 222-223.

⁹⁷ Ebenezer Erskine, *Christ Considered as the Nail Fastened in a Sure Place, Bearing All the Glory of His Father's House* (Edinburgh: David Duncan, 1744), 5-7.

⁹⁸ Hamilton, *Catechism*, 6.

Principle of Love and Gratitude to their covenanted God, and with an Eye to glorify his name.⁹⁹

This crucial connection made by Hamilton and Willison was integral to eighteenth-century covenanting. Covenant 'Duties' were the individual's and Church's response of gratitude for salvation, and act of worship. Therefore, Seceder and Reformed Presbyterian clergy were not innovative in their contention that covenanting was an evangelical necessity. Alexander Moncrieff insisted that 'Covenanting' was an 'engagement in the strength of grace to fulfil the law of Christ; to obey the law as a rule of life, in the hand of the Mediator'. In this way, covenanting functioned as a formal acknowledgment and response to God's gracious provision of salvation through covenant. This paralleled biblical Israel's Covenant duties. Covenant 'duties' were summarily outlined by the Decalogue.¹⁰⁰

Defending the Covenant Way

Apart from the *Marrow* controversy, it was not so much resistance to the Seceders' position of applying the law to Christian living that brought disdain from other evangelicals. It was the Seceders' insistence upon corporate covenanting—ecclesiastical and national—that provoked. The Seceders' understanding of the law's application to the Christian preserved their understanding of the monopleuric, unconditional administration of the covenant of grace. But they also ably highlighted the dipleuric dimension of the covenant relationship through covenanting. This was an intricate balance. Theologically, this assumed that the Old and New Testaments were bound together as a united administration of the gracious covenant that progressively unfolded within history and through which Christ mediated. Those who rejected the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians' federal theology argued that discontinuity existed between the biblical covenants. This became the fundamental argument against federal theology's corporate application. Therefore, if the Secession and

⁹⁹ Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, 136.

¹⁰⁰ Moncrieff, *Observations*, 10.

Reformed Presbyterians were going to preserve covenanting, they needed to defend the Sinaitic covenant's continuity within redemptive history as in line with a gracious covenant.

The Sinaitic covenant's harmonization within the federal system was not a Scottish innovation. As a seemingly irresolvable debate, particularly within Puritanism,¹⁰¹ even the Westminster Assembly struggled to find anything more than a broad consensus.¹⁰² Yet, it was the conviction of those influenced by the *Marrow* that the Sinaitic covenant was administrated within the covenant of grace because it was a postlapsarian covenant. This was the view of the Scottish divine Samuel Rutherford.¹⁰³ Secession and Reformed Presbyterians held firmly to the *Marrow's* doctrine which stated,

by way of ingrency, as a part of the covenant of grace, as if that covenant had been incomplete without the covenant of works...It was added by way of subserviency and attendance, the better to advance and make effectual the covenant of grace; so that although the same covenant that was made with Adam was renewed on mount Sinai, yet I say still, it was not for the same purpose.¹⁰⁴

This fitted within the parameters of the *Confession*. Indeed, the Seceders maintained that 'When the Lord erected the *Jews* into a national Church at Mount Sinai, the moral Law, as it was there published, and all the Sacrifices and typical Ordinances which he instituted among them, were full of free Grace...'¹⁰⁵ However, as opposition to this position mounted during the century, so also did animosity toward any idea that a nation could be in covenant with God. The opponents of covenanting attacked the Sinaitic covenant's continuity with the covenant of grace. In combating 'adversaries' of covenanting, William Moncrieff asserted that the 'true nature of the Sinai transaction' was vital to show that the practice had not

¹⁰¹ Kevan, *Law*, 113-114, Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 27-31.

¹⁰² See *WCF*, 7.5-6. The outcome of the Puritan debate was that the Sinaitic covenant was broadly defined as within the covenant of grace according to the *WCF*. Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective*, 78, has alluded to this as well.

¹⁰³ Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 93-95.

¹⁰⁴ C.G. M'Crie, ed., *Marrow of Modern Divinity in Two Parts 1645 and 1649* (Glasgow: D.Bryce, 1902), 54-55. It should not be surprising that a wide variety of thought existed among the Puritans about the exact nature of the Sinaitic covenant. See Kevan, *Law*.

¹⁰⁵ *ACDG*, v.

'ceased to be a duty, with the ceasing of the Mosaic oeconomy.'¹⁰⁶ The 'adversary' that Moncrieff had referred to was James Smith (1708-1775), a Church of Scotland minister and the author of *A Compendius Account*.¹⁰⁷ Smith became hostile to the practice of covenanting on theological, if not sociological grounds. According to Smith, the evangelical predilection for covenanting piety within the mid-eighteenth-century was of 'great zeal'.¹⁰⁸ Thus, Smith's lengthy treatise attempted to take another Seceder, James Morison, to task.¹⁰⁹ Smith insisted that the foundational issue was:

the covenant which the God and king of *Israel* made with them as a typical people and a national church at *Sinai*, and the renewing it upon their part, on some after-occasions, is... pled by some in favour of national covenanting under the new covenant, or new testament; and particularly in defence of the covenants, national and solemn league, in these lands, in the last century, and in support of the obligation that Christians in these lands are under, to continue that practice in this and every succeeding age. What they offer, among other things of no greater weight upon this head...

Smith concluded that, 'the covenant at Sinai' and the 'ritual' of covenanting associated with 'that covenant' 'ceases'. 'Consequently, the covenant itself is dissolved...The moral law, in the mean time, continues to bind Christians' under a 'better covenant'.¹¹⁰ An anonymous pamphlet written against Smith's arguments adds clarity:

Our author's most formidable-like objection against national-religious covenants, is taken from the Sinai covenant...He makes, this foresaid covenant in the whole foundation, form and matter thereof, a mere earthly, temporal covenant, quite distinct from the covenant of the gospel preached to Abraham, at least, that there was no part of Abraham's covenant in it as the foundation of this solemn transaction; but makes it a new covenant of works, fenced with the sanctions of the earthly rewards and punishments of a settlement and continuance in the earthly Canaan, in case of obedience; and expulsion therefrom, in case of disobedience!!!¹¹¹

Smith insisted that the 'Sinaitic covenant' was 'clearly distinguished from the covenant intimated unto Abraham, which was...[the] covenant of grace, and called the gospel, in

¹⁰⁶ Moncrieff, *Observations*, 8.

¹⁰⁷ James Smith, *Compendius Account...of the Form and Order of the Church of God* (Edinburgh: Donaldson and Reid, 1765).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰⁹ Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 14-15.

¹¹⁰ Smith, *Compendius Account*, 25-26, 27.

¹¹¹ *Animadversions Upon a Pamphlet Intituled, a Compendius Account...*, (Glasgow: John Bryce, 1767), 43-44. This is one of many anonymous pamphlets that took James Smith to task. It was likely from the Reformed Presbyterians but perhaps written by a Secession supporter.

distinction from the law; and is thus: In thee shall all nations be blessed'.¹¹² Perplexed, the pamphleteer concluded,

It is hard to conjecture what has made this author strain, and labour so hard, to exclude the new covenant or gospel, from the Sinai covenant; but that foreseeing if this was granted, then, said transaction behaved to be a standing precedent for national religious covenants under the New Testament, in observing the laws, ordinances, and institutions peculiar to that dispensation. But being tinctured with a deep prejudice against, he has given said transaction such a legal, earthly cast!¹¹³

Smith may have embraced a form of federal theology, but it was not the robust form still held by Secession and Reformed Presbyterians. It is interesting that Smith 'adopted views of Independent Church government' and left the Church of Scotland in 1768 with another minister Robert Ferrier, two years after writing his anti-covenanting treatise.¹¹⁴ Smith and Ferrier opened the first 'Old Scots Independent congregation' at Balchrystie, Fife.¹¹⁵

Smith's arguments were nothing new. In the 1720s John Glas had asserted that covenanting was 'peculiar to the Jews'.¹¹⁶ Glas who became an ecclesiastical independent and was deposed by the national Church, denied both Scotland's status as a covenanted nation and its national Church ideal.¹¹⁷ According to William Moncrieff, who lamented that 'there is such a speat of opposition to our solemn covenants, and to covenanting-work, at this day', the thrust of the anti-covenanting literature was based on the improper theological interpretation 'of the Sinai Covenant'.¹¹⁸ It is little wonder that a vast amount of pamphleteering by Secession and Reformed Presbyterians centred-around the Sinaitic covenant, the place of the moral law as a 'rule' of Christian obedience and the application of it as the basis of individual and corporate piety.

¹¹² Smith, *Compendius Account*, 24.

¹¹³ *Animadversions*, 46.

¹¹⁴ Hew Scott, ed., *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* rev. ed., 10 vols. (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1915-), V.224.

¹¹⁵ Donald Beaton, 'Old Scots Independents', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 3 (1929): 135-145.

¹¹⁶ Glas, *Narrative*, 155, 159, 183-184.

¹¹⁷ Glas' sentence was revoked by the General Assembly in 1739. See, D.B. Murray, 'John Glas', in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel de S. Cameron (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993).

¹¹⁸ Moncrieff, *Observations*, 37, 5.

But it was Alexander Pirie (1737-1804) who became the chief architect of anti-covenanting arguments. A former divinity professor in moral philosophy for the Antiburgher Synod, he argued on a similar basis as Glas and Smith. Pirie was excommunicated for his contumacious spirit for failing to receive the Antiburgher Synod's rebuke over his teaching of Henry Kame's (1696-1782) *Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (1751). In 1765, he joined the Burgher Synod. A year later he produced an *Essay on National Covenanting*, which was the sharpest attack against the practice since Glas's in the 1720s.¹¹⁹ Once 'such a zealot' for the 'national covenants' and a subscriber of the Secession 'Bond' for Covenant renewal, Pirie refuted covenanting on theological grounds. He denied covenanting 'to be a moral duty, and ordinance of Christ'. Instead, he saw the Sinaitic covenant 'as a giving of the covenant of works'. He claimed that covenanting was only legitimate as 'a political' duty.¹²⁰ The Seceders could not tolerate any denial of covenanting as an ordinance of biblical, Presbyterian worship. Pirie knew that the Sinaitic covenant was covenanting's foundation. He noted that if he could call into question Sinai's place within the federal system, covenanting would be rendered 'irrelevant'. He appropriately noted the lack of historic consensus that surrounded such a theological formulation. 'Christians have been strangely divided in this point for two centuries past, and much has been said on both sides of the question...' Pirie's conclusion was that 'The Sinai Covenant has now vanished away, and, as a covenant, is no more in force'. 'Consequently', he asserted, 'all these covenants which were intended to renew it, have perished with it...' But he furthered his scrutiny of covenanting:

Those who maintain national covenanting to be a gospel duty, argue, on the other hand, that they have commands, promises, and example for their conduct. They allege that they have a moral command for it, *Vow to the Lord your God...* (*Psal.lxxvi.11*); but this is surely a great mistake. Here is no account of national vowing at all. This was a ceremonial command, and has only a reference to the law-church....Swearing to adhere to the Sinai covenant is nowhere

¹¹⁹ Alexander Pirie, *An Essay on National Covenanting* (Edinburgh: W.Gray, 1766). Pirie never fully affirmed nor denied his writing of the *Essay*. He did agree to the doctrine and criticisms contained within it.

¹²⁰ Associate Synod, *Narrative of the Process against Mr.Alexander Pirie...* (Edinburgh: 1768), 37.

called vowing: and under the gospel we no where read of the practice of vowing unless in that single instance of Paul, wherein he evidently conformed to a Jewish Custom.¹²¹

While the *Essay* ruffled the feathers of the Secession, it was Pirie's answers to the Presbytery that really generated animosity. The Presbytery of Perth and Dunfermline took great offence to Pirie's formal answers against national covenanting, as they did with his criticism of their covenant theology. The Presbytery was greatly disturbed that Pirie concluded 'that nothing was in the Sinai transaction as a covenant, that was not to end when the Christian scheme commenced. That the Sinai transaction required nothing by external obedience, and promised and threatened nothing but temporal rewards and punishments.' They also were offended that he 'Denied that the preface to the ten commands contained the covenant of grace, but was only a revelation of the grace of God'.¹²²

In his answers to the Presbytery, Pirie was unashamedly critical of the federal theology and ecclesiastical motivations of the Burgher and Antiburgher Synods.¹²³ He contended that the Seceders 'sometimes affirm, that the commands of God given to the Israelitish nation were partly moral, partly ceremonial, and partly political; But when it serves the low designs of a party, they teach again that they were all moral, and so still binding on all people'.

Moreover, he asserted, 'Allied to the foregoing tenant is their doctrine concerning the Sinai covenant. That covenant, say they, is still binding on all Christians'. 'They maintain the Sinai Covenant was a Covenant of works, of grace, and of duty. As to the covenant of duty,—no such covenant is mentioned in the book of God: it is a clergy covenant. Besides, how absurd is this doctrine! Can any covenant be both a covenant of works and of grace?' This was at least a challenge to the *Marrow* interpretation. It was certainly a criticism of the Seceders' federal theology. The confusion generated by subtle nuances within federal

¹²¹ Pirie, *Essay*, 10-13, see also 20.

¹²² Associate Synod, *Narrative*, 6, see also 8-13.

¹²³ Alexander Pirie, *Answer to Two Pamphlets...By James Wylie and William Moncrieffe: Against the Essay on National Covenanting* (Edinburgh: William Gray, 1767).

theology made matters worse.¹²⁴ Pirie even noted that the 'Burgher Presbytery of Perth' 'assert that justification to eternal life was the chief thing in the Sinai covenant or law of Moses. This is an heresy, aversive of scripture...' This was an overstatement of what the Burghers actually declared to Pirie during the controversy. Doubtless, in his harsh criticism, he was referring to the Seceders' position that Sinai was included within the gracious administration of the covenant, rather than a simple renewal of the covenant of works. This, in light of Pirie's next allegation that the Seceders' affirmed 'That the Sinai covenant was not founded on temporal rewards and punishments...[because] the whole law of Moses...[contained] temporal blessings', demonstrates that Pirie, perhaps even some of the Burgher Seceders, had become confused in the debate.

Pirie's *Essay*, his answers to the Burgher Synod, as well as another accusation of heterodoxy (that he had denied the perfect humanity of Christ) placed him under severe ecclesiastical discipline. By 1769, he had completely denounced national covenanting and joined the Relief Presbytery.¹²⁵ He concluded that national covenanting had never been a practice of the New Testament Church since 'Christ neither practised himself, nor enjoined upon others' what was once a practice of Israel.¹²⁶ In 1778, he left a Relief congregation in Stirlingshire, and like Glas and Smith, concluded his ministry as an Independent.¹²⁷ Pirie had rejected federal theology. While the Burgher and Antiburgher Synods sought to refute his arguments against covenanting, the winds of change had begun to blow. With ever greater ferocity, Pirie's arguments against corporate covenanting would reverberate during the later part of the century.

By the 1760s, the Antiburghers had become the Secession movement's lone voice in defending covenanting, as the Burghers had become strikingly silent in defending the

¹²⁴ Alexander Pirie, *Review of the Principles of the Seceders...* (Edinburgh: W.Gray, 1769), 13-14.

¹²⁵ For the complete account see, Associate Synod, *Narrative*.

¹²⁶ Pirie, *Review*, 11.

¹²⁷ M'Kerrow, *History*, 289-291.

practice.¹²⁸ The Antiburghers laboured to clarify covenanting's place within federal theology, and how that theology harmonized with the biblical covenants' continuity. The Sinaitic covenant's placement within the federal system is important in understanding how Secession and Reformed Presbyterians attempted to avoid legalism and antinomianism, and preserve covenanting. Appealing to the authority of the *Confession* and the Bible, William Moncrieff maintained that 'the covenant of grace was promulgated at Sinai'. Moncrieff also qualified that 'the covenant of works' was only repeated at Sinai to warn those 'who have not been brought within the bond of the covenant of grace'. 'The covenant of grace was delivered to Israel from mount Sinai' and contained the 'sum' of the covenant of grace God had 'made with Abraham' and the same 'promise is here promulgated to Israel, to be the foundation of their faith'. The Sinai covenant extended the moral law as the 'law of Christ' or 'a rule of life to believers', and carried an 'obligation to obedience' for holiness, but not for salvation. 'No doubt', continued Moncrieff, 'Sinai' contained 'something peculiar to Israel, and the infant state of the church; as that transaction included the whole of the ceremonial law, or all those typical institutions and ordinances which belonged to the Mosaic oecconomy. But these, all had respect to JESUS CHRIST the great antitype' and 'contained a more obscure and imperfect administration of the covenant of grace'. Sinai's significance was that it intended 'to shew' Israel 'the impossibility of dealing with God' through a covenant of works 'and convince them' of their 'necessity of a Mediator'.¹²⁹ Adam Gib furthered Moncrieff's argument. 'In dispensing the moral law from Sinai', he explained, 'the LORD was not *renewing* the Covenant of Works with Israel'. Gib's argument clearly articulated that the covenant of works 'was not capable of renovation, as it had never been antiquated for one moment'. In fact, Gib asserted, 'It was still a commanding and cursing law upon the whole posterity' of Adam. Gib dismissed any arguments to the contrary. Any

¹²⁸ John Brown, *Historical Account*, 62-63, notes the degrees to which both groups maintained the practice. This will be discussed in a subsequent section.

¹²⁹ Moncrieff, *Observations*, 6-8.

‘supposition of God’s *renewing* the Covenant of Works with them at Sinai’, he added, implied ‘some very monstrous absurdities’. Gib listed some of the ‘absurdities’.

That God had first absolved them from the original curse of the Covenant of Works, and all its original obligation upon them; to pave the way for their entering into it with him of new, as upon terms of mutual and absolute friendship: That the law, upon this superseding of all its former claims, was then designed for giving eternal life to them; upon condition of their future and perfect conformity to it: And that God did hold this Covenant-dealing with that sinful people, absolutely incapable of compliance with it; even when declaring them at the same time over and over unrighteous...

‘The truth of the case’, Gib believed, was ‘that the Covenant law was given to them from Sinai, in a very singular manner; with peculiar and most tremendous circumstances’.¹³⁰ The primary motivation of all biblical covenants was grace. ‘Even at Mount Sinai, when the law was revealed in a covenant-form and attended with unspeakable terrors’, another Antiburgher preached, ‘God would not reveal it to fallen man, without prefacing it with a revelation of the covenant of grace’. Even when God ‘called his people to obey his law, he called them to obey it in the exercise of faith’. Even then it was ‘“ordained in the hand of a Mediator,”’ always subservient to the covenant of grace.¹³¹

Lying below the surface was an emphasis on the biblical covenants’ redemptive-historical continuity. As Israel covenanted to obey the duties of divine law, the Church was to do likewise. The covenant at Sinai ‘had promises’ but the ‘New Covenant’ according to the Bible was a ‘*better covenant [that] was established upon better promises*’. The New covenant ‘is expressly said to be a *better covenant* than that of the old,—particularly, as being *established on better promises*’. The idea was that the Siniatic covenant had gracious promises within it, but the advent of Christ brought ‘completion’ and ‘fuller accomplishment’ to it. Evidence of the fuller accomplishment of God’s covenant in the New Testament was thought to be the ‘promise of the Holy Ghost; enduing Christians with a far higher measure of knowledge and holiness than the saints of old’. James Morison argued,

¹³⁰ Gib, *Kaina Kai Palaia*, 108-109.

¹³¹ John Jamieson, *The Duties, Afflictions, and Consolations, of the Faithful Minister* (Edinburgh: Murray & Cochrane, 1786), 27.

‘What are we to understand by what is called the old covenant, which God “made with the people of Israel, in the day when he took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt?”’ Morison’s response was that the Sinaitic covenant ‘had promises’. ‘We are undoubtedly to understand that whole system of laws, ordinances, and statutes, which was given by Moses in the wilderness of Sinai; as what he brought the people of Israel under a covenant-engagement to receive and observe, according to what we read in the 24th chap. of Exodus’. Thus, ‘All the promises which had hitherto been made to the Church of God, to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, and the rest of the godly patriarchs; and particularly, the greatest of all the promises in Exodus xx.2. “I am the Lord thy God, who have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”’ ‘The Covenanters at *Sinai*’ Morison noted, ‘had all these promises to assure them of the heavenly inheritance, as well as of the earthly Canaan—and to animate them *to vow a vow unto the Lord, and to perform it.*’ Again, emphasizing continuity between the biblical covenants Morison concluded, ‘For we are not to suppose, that the *Sinaitic* dispensation hurt, but bettered the church; as it belongs to the method of God’s dealing with his church and people’ and ‘that all succeeding dispensations should include all the advantages of foregoing ones’.¹³² Gib’s summary that the biblical covenants’ continuity rested within an overall gracious covenant ‘administration’ is noteworthy, since what occurred at Sinai ‘was the very same which still takes place’ ‘with regard to all the members of the visible Church’.

...Israel, at Sinai, were under an Administration which had been made to Abraham, for himself and his seed, was still in force concerning them; no way made of none effect, by the law...dispensed[at Sinai]...And the Lord promised to them, upon that matter, what was more expressly promised afterwards; even that supernatural writing of the law on their hearts, in which it was to be divested of its Covenant-form to them,—remaining only as a rule of life for their sanctification, while justified in the way of the Covenant of Grace. Israel was formed, at Sinai, into a *peculiar* people; as both a church and nation, distinct from all other people: And God renewed with them his Covenant for them with their fathers, concerning their possession of the earthly Canaan. This possession was to be held, according to his promise; through their maintaining, in that land, the whole system of his worship and laws,—in the ceremonial, and typical, and judicial ordinances which he established among them. But in that peculiar Covenant, there was an administration to them of the Covenant of Grace: As it referred typically to the heavenly Canaan; the possession of which, according to other

¹³² Morison, *Covenanting Catechism*, 21-22.

typical ordinances, was to be enjoyed upon the...condition to be fulfilled by the....Surety of that Covenant [Christ].¹³³

The Sinaitic covenant was never seen as altering the graciousness of the historically unfolding covenant relationship itself. What this covenant did was solidify the relationship in corporate terms. It bound God and his people with mutual responsibilities of faithfulness to the covenant relationship. If the Sinaitic covenant remained applicable, indeed parallel to the Church, corporate covenanting in its ecclesiastical capacity was the necessary corollary for the Seceders. The Reformed Presbyterians differed little in their theological position. They saw the Sinaitic covenant not only as applicable to the national Church idea, but as the connection between Church and State.¹³⁴ Beyond solidifying corporate covenanting, the Sinaitic covenant's application gave credence to the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians' ideals of corporate sanctification.

Covenant Duty and Sanctification

Theologically, covenanting relied on Old Testament parallels. Sinai's purpose was to manifest the super-abounding grace of God toward his chosen Israel. At Sinai, Israel was also instituted as a Church. The law served as the basis by which Israel was called to live within the covenant relationship. James Morison stipulated that 'The covenant which the people of Israel swore unto the Lord...was of the same general nature with our covenant-engagements: As the Sinaitic covenant was an engagement to the duties of that time; so our national covenants are an engagement to the duties of our times'. Morison further explained that just as 'the Sinaitic covenant' was 'binding on posterity' so it is 'reasonable to conclude, that our solemn covenants are binding in like manner...Israel's league with the Gibeonites is a remarkable example of this purpose'.¹³⁵ It was also believed that Sinai assumed a corporate order with the emphasis on social life within the covenant. The Decalogue, viewed

¹³³ Gib, *Kaina Kai Palaia*, 110-111.

¹³⁴ Reformed Presbyterian Church, *Testimony*[1866], 237-240. See Chapter 6

¹³⁵ Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 70.

as the charter or constitution of the covenant relationship, outlined the way in which the people of God ought to live. William Moncrieff explained that ‘There was also at Sinai’ a mutual engagement, or ‘Israel’s covenant of duty’. The people responded to God’s provision of the covenant of grace ‘with one voice, *All that the Lord hath said, will we do*. And the Lord approves of their resolution and engagement...Deut.v.28’. But Moncrieff offered the significant warning that ‘many among [Israel] entered into this engagement in a legal way; through their natural bias in their hearts to the covenant of works...and mistaking the meaning of this transaction’. He also, affirmed that ‘such as had faith among [Israel]’, renounced their holding of the covenant of works, took hold of God’s covenant of grace—and in the strength promised in that covenant, devoted themselves to the Lord in a covenant of duty’.¹³⁶ James Morison preached that ‘By taking hold of the covenant of grace,—as the sure and stable ground of hope for eternity, and as a magazine of all suitable furniture for close walking with God’ a Christian would ‘be saved from turning a covenant of duty into a covenant of works,—but withal animated to live a life of new obedience, and to vow a vow unto the Lord accordingly’.¹³⁷ In this manner, the covenant of duty was not envisaged as arduous obedience, but inclusive of the much deeper virtues of gratitude and fidelity—covenantal fidelity.

Sinai symbolized how the covenant relationship ought to function between God and his people. The Sinaitic covenant’s stipulations were not seen as those which could be accepted or rejected.¹³⁸ Similarly, the moral law’s role administrated the covenant relationship and was understood to give direction to Christian obedience. John Young clarified this view. He asserted that ‘Every person’ entering into covenant with God ‘necessarily lays himself under the strongest obligations to be the Lord’s; and to walk as becomes one of God’s covenanted

¹³⁶ Moncrieff, *Observations*, 6-8.

¹³⁷ Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 153, 159.

¹³⁸ *ACDG*, v, 70.

people, in all the ways of new obedience'.¹³⁹ Christian experience, or life in covenant with God, could be rendered inauthentic without a dedicated public and moral expression.¹⁴⁰

Covenanting tangibly encapsulated federal theology's mutual dimension. It offered a symbolic practice of individual or corporate piety. The Antiburgher minister John Muirhead (d.1797) preached a sermon that emphasized that one 'cannot imitate God in making sovereignly gracious promises, yet his example affords an argument unto the practice of covenanting. If the Most High God deign to bind himself, by way of covenant to us, Is it too much that we bind ourselves, by way of covenant to him?'¹⁴¹ This experience of God's love through the covenant relationship was thought to produce improved conduct and deeper devotion. The Seceders established this idea in their doctrinal standards. Their *ACDG* stated: 'The Covenant of Grace...lays us under much further Obligation to Duty and Service, than the Covenant of Works...' This was because 'the 'Obligation to vow and pay our Vows, to covenant and perform or keep our Covenants of Duty and Service to God in Christ, is yet more strengthened and furthered by our being under a fuller and clearer Dispensation of the Covenant of Grace'.¹⁴²

The regularity with which 'duties' of the covenant relationship were discussed by Secession and Reformed Presbyterians is indicative of their importance within covenant theology. While always remaining connected with grace, the expression 'duty' covered the whole range of biblical imperatives for obedience. Covenant duties were the 'mutual' dimension, fulfilled by Christian obedience, to live according to covenant 'promises'.¹⁴³ James Morison's *Catechism* enquired into 'What sort of obedience is it that believers engage unto, in a covenant of duty?' He asserted:

¹³⁹ Young, *Evangelical Covenanting*, 15.

¹⁴⁰ Fisher, *Shorter Catechism Explained*, 42ff.

¹⁴¹ Muirhead, *Foederal Transactions*, 76.

¹⁴² *ACDG*, 74-75.

¹⁴³ Muirhead, *Foederal Transactions*, 31.

They do not presume to engage to perfect obedience: Because such obedience is impracticable in this life; while there is no promise of perfect freedom from sin, or of the communication of such a measure of grace on this side of heaven, as would be absolutely necessary to the performance of perfect obedience. But they engage to the obedience of sons; not of mercenary slaves, but of free-born children,—according to the new nature of that law which they oblige themselves to observe. And consequently, they engage to progressive obedience; honestly to hold on in the Lord's way—without turning back, but with ardent desires of perfection...we engage to such obedience as he promises to work in us.¹⁴⁴

The Seceders conceived their understanding of holiness to be of an 'evangelical' nature.

Covenant piety could not be authentic if it derived from fear of God's vindictive wrath or from a servile hope of salvation by merit. Filial reverence to obey the law was stirred from faith in the covenant God. This echoed the *Confession's* language of 'yielding obedience...not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love, and willing mind'.¹⁴⁵ Thus, only through personal union with Christ was a Christian able to cultivate covenantal piety.¹⁴⁶

Among Secession and Reformed Presbyterians, covenanting was the supreme action of Christian sanctification. The people of God should live in unwavering gratitude for what God had promised by way of covenant. 'It is a solemn surrender of our persons and services to him', Morison asserted. 'It is an avowing as in his sight,—that we are his in all that we are, and have, and can do. It is a public confession of our intire[sic] dependence on him, in every capacity and in every respect.—all which are unquestionably of a moral nature; and will be esteemed to be so, by all that have the declarative glory of God at heart'.¹⁴⁷ Ralph Erskine preached that 'covenanting' had a primary 'end and design' which was to bring Christians 'under a covenant of duty and gratitude' and 'to make' 'a holy people'.¹⁴⁸ A broader evangelical theology had developed during the period that began to reject 'covenanting' as a 'necessity' of holiness. It maintained that a personal 'real-heart religion' 'ought to be all their care'. Yet, Seceders such as Morison averred that corporate 'Covenanting' was 'no impediment', but 'an incentive unto real godliness'.

¹⁴⁴ Morison, *Covenanting Catechism*, 46-47.

¹⁴⁵ *WCF*, 22.1.

¹⁴⁶ Brown, *Compendius View*, 482-483.

¹⁴⁷ Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 21-22.

¹⁴⁸ Erskine, *Covenanting Work*, 223-224.

*Can a searching and trying our ways, and a turning again to the Lord; can a sighing and crying for all the abominations that are done in the midst of the land; can a swearing to keep God's righteous judgments;—can any or all there be of any detriment to true holiness?...that the law of God obligeth it,—on special occasions...must certainly import the very highest necessity...Nothing can be more reasonable, than that creatures be obliged to yield an absolute subjection to the will of God...*¹⁴⁹

Covenanting piety was a dynamic understanding of both individual and corporate sanctification.¹⁵⁰

Oaths and Vows

Coextensive with accepting the covenant relationship was the mutual obligation of Christian obedience to the moral law and the humble 'allegiance' to Divine 'Lordship'.¹⁵¹ Thus, in order to promote publically the 'covenanted' way, ceremonial occasions remained vital to Secession and Reformed Presbyterian piety in demonstrating fidelity to the covenant relationship. The 'oath of the covenant is a binding oath; God sware to Christ...[in the covenant of grace]'. 'It is an oath to him relating unto us' and in turn 'binding us to swear an allegiance of gratitude, and grateful service to him'.¹⁵² The Old Testament language of 'Oaths and Vows' was an important feature of covenanting practice. John Brown asserted that 'the three first precepts of the moral law' [the Decalogue] were the basis of covenant duties. 'The first [command] requires us to avouch the Lord to be our God—why may not a number do this together? The second, enjoins our receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, the ordinances of God's worship—why may we not vow to be faithful to this trust, and to cleave to the Lord? Especially, when the third requires us to *swear by his name, and vow to the mighty God of Jacob*.'¹⁵³ Likewise, James Morison maintained that the biblical basis for corporate covenanting was 'When a people, in a public and social capacity, devote themselves to the Lord, in the same covenant-engagement, as in the case of the "five cities in the land of Egypt," of whom it is foretold, that they should "swear to the Lord of

¹⁴⁹ Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 67.

¹⁵⁰ Young, *Evangelical Covenanting*, 15.

¹⁵¹ Black, *Directory*, 29-30.

¹⁵² Erskine, *Covenanting Work*, 225.

¹⁵³ Brown, *Historical Account*, 6.

hosts'''. 'National Covenanting' was thought to be a legitimate means of promoting piety when 'the generality of a nation concur in it; as in the case of Israel'. Morison also maintained, that 'because God's law, which is perfect, must be obligatory on us, in every capacity wherein we stand—in public and social, as well as in private and personal capacity; as to all those duties which can be performed in a public and social capacity'. Hence, 'The first three commandments' of the Decalogue demonstrated corporate 'vowing unto God'. Likewise, the Seceders appealed to the *Larger Catechism*, which made 'Vowing unto God one of the ordinances which the second commandment requires us to receive, observe, and keep pure and entire...'¹⁵⁴ 'Swearing' 'oaths and vows' became the recognition of God's authority as Lawgiver and King and the Church's compliance to be faithful in their public testimony of obedience.¹⁵⁵

National covenanting was a binding of the individual, Church and/or nation to the law by 'superadded' obligations. This was an obligation, not increasing the original obligation of the moral law in and of itself, but one entirely distinct from it. John Brown of Haddington stated:

In this view, have all nations of mankind, in all ages, made use of secondary obligations, of promises, bonds, vows, promissory oaths, as means of more deeply impressing the original mandates of the law of nature or revelation, by the constitution of the new, solemn, and distinct obligation, which cannot be violated...The obligation of the divine law to perform the duties contained in the [National] covenants was the same thousands of years ere they were thought of, and would have been the same, suppose they had never been thought of, and is entirely divine. The law of God warrants the constitution of the obligation of lawful covenants of duty...¹⁵⁶

'By our religious vows, oaths and covenants with God, we bind ourselves with a bond, we bring ourselves under a moral obligation, distinct from that of the divine law, to do according to all that proceedeth out of our mouth', according to Archibald Mason.¹⁵⁷ The idea of a 'Bond' became vital to the Seceders' preservation of Scotland's Covenants.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Morison, *Covenanting Catechism*, 13,14.

¹⁵⁵ Fisher, *Shorter Catechism Explained*, 72, Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 9.

¹⁵⁶ Brown, *Historical Account*, 9-10.

¹⁵⁷ Mason, *Observations*, 36.

¹⁵⁸ The Seceders' 'Bond' is discussed in Chapters 5-6.

While there were theological distinctions between oaths, vows, and Covenants, each attempted to savour the rich symbolism of the Old Testament's covenanted people. What is even more important is that the 'perpetual obligation' of Scotland's Covenants rested on their identification as oaths and vows. Oaths and vows connected covenanting with worship in a public manner.¹⁵⁹ 'An Oath' was 'an act of worship, wherein God' was 'called upon, as a witness, for the confirmation of' an action.¹⁶⁰ An oath was defined as 'either assertory or promissory'. The 'assertory' oath is when 'one swears, that what he says is the truth' as was 'commonly done' in civil courts to decide legal disputes. 'A promissory oath is when one swears, that he shall perform a certain' action 'as is frequently done in an oath of allegiance to the civil magistrate'. The 'assertory' oath 'respects the past existence of certain events' and the 'promissory' oath 'respects the future performance of certain duties'. A covenanting 'Oath' 'partakes of the nature of both these'. Moreover, a 'promissory' oath is 'distinguished from a vow'. 'In promissory oaths, God is the witness, but some other is the party'. In a vow, 'God is both witness and party'. 'Thus, in so far as the oath of our Covenants respects our duty to one another, it is a promissory oath; but as therein God is not only the witness appealed unto, but the great Party we have to do with, it is most properly a vow'.¹⁶¹ Doubtless, Scotland's successive national 'Covenants' were vows. Yet in respect to the Solemn League and Covenant, the covenanting zealots saw this as an oath since 'the inhabitants of Britain and Ireland plighted their faith to one another for mutual reformation...to endeavour the preservation of the true reformed religion'.¹⁶² These technical designations of 'vows' and 'oaths' often were employed in the later eighteenth-century in order to distinguish covenants of duty from the covenant of grace.

¹⁵⁹ Oaths and vows originate from the Reformation tradition. See Moon, *Christ the Mediator*, 190-191.

¹⁶⁰ Fisher, *Shorter Catechism Explained*, 72.

¹⁶¹ Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 11, Reformed Presbyterian Church, *Testimony*[1866], 195ff.

¹⁶² Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 13.

Unmistakeably, adherence to ‘covenant duties’ came from Chapter XXII of the *Westminster Confession*.¹⁶³ Chapter XXII was viewed as supportive of the idea that covenanting was ‘a part of religious worship’ by William Moncrieff.¹⁶⁴ Hence, the *Confession*’s statement *Of Lawful Oaths and Vows* was ostensibly understood as linking the National Covenant, Solemn League and Covenant, and the ceremony of covenanting with federal theology. After the 1820’s, Scottish theology appears to have become disinterested with Chapter XXII. This corresponded with the practice of covenanting falling into disuse as nineteenth-century Presbyterianism disengaged from the previous two centuries’ constructions of federal theology. A noteworthy exception to this is Robert Shaw’s *Exposition of the Confession of Faith* (1845).¹⁶⁵ Interestingly, prior to his joining the Free Church of Scotland during the 1852 Church union, Shaw was a member of the ‘Original Secession’ Church where he served as Synod clerk from 1832-1852.¹⁶⁶

The corporate swearing of oaths and vows by Secession and Reformed Presbyterians was never taken lightly. Reservations of heart and mind, hidden motives or duplicity, could not accompany an authentic oath.¹⁶⁷ The ‘solemn avouching’ of God was the formal acknowledgment of obligations to holiness through covenanting whereby the people of God ‘openly own, acknowledge and confess him to be their God; and he openly owns, acknowledges, and confesses them to be his people’.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, vowing unto God was a significant ‘ordinance of worship’.¹⁶⁹ Ralph Erskine confidently remarked that this ‘solemn’ act of worship was ‘for exciting us to our duty, and strengthening our hands therein’ to carry

¹⁶³ Moncrieff, *Observations*, 3. See also, Young, *Evangelical Covenanting*, 17-18.

¹⁶⁴ Moncrieff, *Observations*, 27.

¹⁶⁵ Robert Shaw, *Exposition of the Confession of Faith*, Reprint 1845 ed. (Inverness: Christian Focus, 1980), 245-240.

¹⁶⁶ William Ewing, ed., *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland 1843-1900*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1914), 313.

¹⁶⁷ Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, 240, Moncrieff, *Observations*, 27.

¹⁶⁸ Erskine, *Covenanting Work*, 221-ff.

¹⁶⁹ Morison, *Covenanting Catechism*, 14. Morison saw the *Larger Catechism* as teaching this.

out Covenant 'obedience'.¹⁷⁰ 'Avouching the Lord's name' was a unifying exercise that consecrated 'a people of God' to purity.¹⁷¹ In an 1807 sermon series to the Antiburgher congregation at Cupar Angus, Alexander Allan described covenanting as 'when the people of God, standing forth in the character of his witnesses, and making a public confession of his name...do, in a formal and solemn manner, recognise his sovereign lordship and authority over them...binding themselves, in the strength of divine grace, to cleave to him with purpose of heart, and to serve him in the conscientious discharge of every duty they owe either to God or man'.¹⁷² It was a time of deep humiliation over sin as well as a joining of oneself along with other like-minded Christians to deeper intimacy with the 'Covenant' God.¹⁷³ In this way, covenanting became a symbolic act of corporate union with Christ. It bound together like-minded Christians who sincerely desired purity in Presbyterian doctrine, worship and polity. However, breaking a solemn vow or oath was understood as perjury against God. 'If the taking of God's Name in vain is forbidden'¹⁷⁴ then not only Pergury[sic], Blasphemy, sinful Cursing, sinful Oaths are forbidden, but sinful Vows, sinful otteries[sic] breaking of lawful Covenants and Vows, making a Profession of Christ's Name in Hypocrisy, the reviling or opposing of God's Truth, Grace and Ways; These are forbidden likewise'.¹⁷⁵ Understanding covenanting as 'oaths and vows' provided another foundation to the principle of the 'perpetual obligation of the National Covenants'.¹⁷⁶ Dereliction of covenant duties meant falling out of favour with God as a people. While not a complete loss of Divine favour *per se*, it was cause for Divine chastisement of an oath-bound people.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁰ Erskine, *Covenanting Work*, 224.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 222.

¹⁷² Allan, *Religious Covenanting*, 6.

¹⁷³ Mason, *Observations*, 9.

¹⁷⁴ Presumably, this was in violation of the 3rd Commandment.

¹⁷⁵ Crawford, *Catechism*, 111.

¹⁷⁶ Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, 24, 81. [Reformed Presbytery?], *Magistracy Settled Upon Its Only True Scriptural Basis...* (Edinburgh: 1747), 16.

¹⁷⁷ James Morison, *An Attempt to Vindicate, Explain and Enforce the Important Duty of a Solemn Acknowledgment of Sin...* (Edinburgh: Fleming and Neill, 1771), 19, 24-27.

Scotland's revival, it was thought, rested on the renewal of its historic Covenants because they demonstrated corporate obedience to the law.

Conclusion

Obedience to the moral law was eighteenth-century covenanting's *raison d'être*. The practice of covenanting, viewed within the stratum of Scotland's federal theology, fell under the rubric of the doctrine of sanctification. Covenanting instilled a corporate resolution toward holiness. It spelled-out the ramifications of life within the covenant of grace.

Covenanting connected the law to the doctrine of Christian sanctification in a tangibly intimate act of worship. The moral law, these evangelicals believed, showed the people of God the parameters of fidelity to the covenant relationship. Theologically, the heavy incorporation of vows and oaths demonstrate that the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians viewed obedience to God, not as a prerequisite to salvation, but as the response to a gracious covenant. While the covenant of grace was monopoleuric in its administration, Christian obedience was the response of gratitude and expressed the dipoleuric dimension of that covenant. Covenanting highlighted an old-fashioned Presbyterian creed, but primarily enhanced Secession and Reformed Presbyterian piety. They consistently placed the Christian life, their Churches' commitment, and the values of a nation under the overarching framework of covenant. Understanding the theological dimensions of the practice demonstrates the sharply Biblicist approach of Secession and Reformed Presbyterians and why they treasured covenanting piety. It also confirms the profound influence that the *Marrow* controversy had on Scottish Presbyterianism and in keeping Covenant piety alive.

The theological connections, which stemmed from classic seventeenth-century federal theology, demonstrate why covenanting remained justified within Secession and Reformed Presbyterian circles and how a lack of consensus regarding law and covenant began to incite evangelicals who had embraced a broader theology. Federal theology's corporate dimensions that were rooted in the belief that the Mosaic covenant had ongoing applicability

began to be seen as dubious and faced significant opposition. The Seceders may have championed absolute grace in salvation and in Christian obedience. However, covenanting piety with all its qualifications and meticulous theological hedging with grace placed heavy emphasis on the 'perpetual obligation' of the Covenants—which were 'superadded obligations'. Maintaining obligations that stemmed from past Presbyterians' commitments, these evangelicals doubtlessly created a traditionalistic legalism. The placement of the Sinaitic covenant within federal theology and the Mosaic law's application to Church and State historically have remained unresolved within the Reformed tradition.¹⁷⁸ A lack of consensus on such issues by previous Reformed theologians perhaps should have sobered these Scottish covenanting stalwarts. In their determination to uphold the 'Covenanted-Reformation' and revive the covenanted Church and nation, Secession and Reformed Presbyterians would use covenanting as a means of elevating the standards for being a Christian. Corporate covenanting became part of their terms of 'Ministerial' communion' and 'Christian communion in the admission to the sealing ordinances'.¹⁷⁹ Hence, covenanting became a litmus test for Christian authenticity.¹⁸⁰ This also infused the practice with a vision of religious solidarity that stood for the 'purity, doctrine worship and discipline' of Presbyterianism. This kind of ecclesiastical unity renounced civil jurisdictions that threatened Presbyterianism as well as damning ecclesiastical heterodoxy.¹⁸¹ Beyond this, covenanting remained more than a dedication to holy living. It was connected with Presbyterian piety of the past. Covenant fidelity was, after all, of 'perpetual' or 'descending obligation'. If Scotland's revival was to take root—if true holiness as Church and nation

¹⁷⁸ Some recent historical theology inquiries are Kevan, *Law*. Richard Muller, 'Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology: Three Variations on a Seventeenth-Century Theme', *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 (1980). Less satisfactory but representative of the contemporary evangelical discussions (polemics) is Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective*, 17-50, 73-85.

¹⁷⁹ *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 119. For the Reformed Presbyterians, the whole *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, which includes 'swearing the Covenants', stood as the terms of ministerial and Christian communion.

¹⁸⁰ James Morison, *Present Duty: In Treatises Relative to the Duty of Covenant-Renovation* (Edinburgh: Neill & Co.), 88-91.

¹⁸¹ *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 119.

was going to blossom—then public obedience to the law through covenanting had to be sown in fertile soil.

CHAPTER FIVE

SACRAMENTAL PIETY

As the certainty that a theology of corporate piety could be established from the Sinaitic covenant began to founder among many evangelicals, it was the sacraments that still perpetuated Scotland's evangelical covenanting ethos. For evangelicals, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper embodied the experiential nature of the covenant relationship and tangibly epitomized federal theology's individual and corporate dimensions.¹ Like John Calvin who defined the sacraments as 'a testimony of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward sign, with mutual attestation of our piety' toward God, Scottish Presbyterianism emphasized that the sacraments' efficacy derived from the 'Word of promise' which alone was the instrumental means in communicating salvation. The 'Holy Spirit', through the 'Word', made the sacraments 'effectual means for Conveying and Applying' God's 'saving benefits'. A Sacrament was 'a sort of appendix' that provided Christians with a visual understanding of the Divine promises. Following Calvin, Presbyterians maintained that the sacraments were 'signs' that graphically portrayed God's 'covenants'. They also understood the sacraments as 'seals' of faith,² analogous to the seals that authenticated 'government documents and other public acts'.³ Evangelicals often articulated how the sacraments were intended to 'ratify and confirm' God's love by increasing faith through the covenant of

¹ Thomas Mair, *Covenant of Duties, Nowise Inconsistent with a Covenant of Grace* (Edinburgh: J. Bruce, 1767), 4.41. In this sermon series from 1728, Mair indicated that baptism and the Lord's Supper were 'eternal symbols and seals of the covenant, which Christ himself did partake of, as the covenant head'. Christ 'partook of circumcision and the Passover, of baptism and the Lord's Supper, not only on other accounts, but particularly on this, for this special end of their institution, even as seals of the certain communication of covenant blessings'.

² James Hog, *Otia Christiana: Or, Christian Recreations* (Edinburgh: Watson, 1708), 117, also demonstrates the dependence eighteenth-century evangelicals displayed on Post-Reformation sources from Europe and Scotland.

³ Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, 34-35, John Willison, *Five Sermons Preached before and after the Celebration of the Lord's Supper* (Edinburgh: J. Mackeuen & Company, 1722), 34. J.T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles, ed., *Institutes*, 4.13.3-4, 4.14.1-6.

grace.⁴ For the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians, the sacramental celebrations especially helped to sustain federal theology's corporate applications until the end of the eighteenth century.

Through the sacraments, the fire of Presbyterianism's evangelical piety was stoked by classic federal theology and memorable epochs of Scottish revivals—both of which correlated through the covenanting ceremony. Lasting memories of Scotland's sixteenth and seventeenth-century revivals perpetuated evangelicals' fascination with sacramental seasons and covenanting.⁵ The Secession and Reformed Presbyterians endeavoured to rejuvenate the sacramental and ceremonial features of seventeenth-century Covenant piety. This was evidenced in 1712 by the 'United Societies' and repeated by the Reformed Presbytery in 1745.⁶ It was most conspicuous in 1744, when the Associate Presbytery's *Act for Renewing the Covenants* declared that the Seceders' 'desired to be humbled before the Lord' because the Church of Scotland had 'not duly made use of the *Sacraments*, as Seals of the Covenant of Grace, and of the Promises there made to us in Christ'.⁷ In the 1770s, the Burgher theologian Archibald Hall portrayed covenanting piety's correlation with the sacraments. 'The covenant which God made with Abraham', he asserted, 'was the foundation of Israel's avouching the Lord according to the whole tenor of the ordinances connected with that covenant under the Mosaic dispensation'. Those ordinances were circumcision and the Passover meal, both of which, Hall concluded, 'continued' until Christ initiated the 'new covenant'. Even with the 'change of the dispensation', he emphatically asserted, 'the *substance* of the covenant remains unchanged!' He reasoned that 'no change' occurred to 'the original covenant, as to its best privileges and noblest obligations, which are [in] substance the same...' He concluded that since 'Christians' were '*Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*', 'it is but reasonable' to maintain that 'under the gospel-

⁴ Hamilton, *Catechism*, 36, 37-39, Fisher, *Shorter Catechism Explained*, 204-210.

⁵ Willison, *Five Sermons*, Sermon III.60-61.

⁶ *Covenant Renewal...Douglas, 1712*.

⁷ *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 112.

dispensation' Christians can 'expressly engage to do and observe all that the Lord...hath appointed and commanded in his church, not only as individuals but as brethren in holy society'. Such 'personal obligations', Hall elaborated, 'are implied in *baptism*; and such social engagements are as strongly implied in receiving the *Lord's Supper*...And if these engagements are implied in the most solemn ordinances of the gospel-church, (even as similar engagements were contained in...circumcision and...Passover), then there is nothing in religious covenanting inconsistent with the genius of the gospel-church, its constitution or its administration'.⁸ However, Hall and the Secession Synods would soon discover that 'covenanting' was viewed by many as 'inconsistent' in the new age of enlightened and broader evangelicalism.

Baptism and Covenant

Federal theology did not diminish the pre-eminence of the doctrine of election. The covenant of grace and election formed an important theological intersection where Church membership, national religion and personal salvation met. Baptism drew these ideas together. But balancing federal theology's individual and corporate dimensions within the structure of a unified national Church may have been one thing. It soon became another thing, given Scotland's multiplicity of denominations after 1733.

Emblematic of Post-Revolution evangelicals, the 'Marrowman' John Williamson preached a universal offer of salvation under the rubric of the 'covenant of grace', but still connected it with election. Williamson averred that persons 'belonging to the Election of Grace, are in the Course of Providence Educated in a Visible Church, Instructed in the Doctrines and Duties of Christianity' and typically 'Hear the Joyful Sound' of 'Free-Grace' 'and [are] Brought into the Way of Salvation'.⁹ The free 'offer' of the 'gospel' preached 'to every creature' was equally important to Ralph Erskine. He asserted, 'We cannot say, you are an

⁸ Archibald Hall, *Gospel Worship...* (Edinburgh: Gray&Alston, 1770), Vol.1.401-402.

⁹ John Williamson, *The Gospel-Method of Conquering Sinners...Several Sermons* (Edinburgh: 1721), sermon viii, 308.

elect man, you are an elect woman, therefore believe'. Erskine preached that only 'God by this gospel, casts the covenant [of grace] in among all the people, saying whosoever will, let him take; whosoever pleases, let him take, and in taking, he shall have proof of his being elect: as it is said of the Jews, *To them belong the covenant and the promises...*' Erskine then pleaded with his congregation, 'the covenant belongs to you, the promise is to you and to your children...this right was sealed to you in baptism, and...proclaimed to you in this gospel'.¹⁰ 'This covenant-relation to God', preached Erskine's fellow evangelical John Willison, 'is our greatest happiness' because people 'break their leagues and covenants...but God will never break his covenant of grace with his people'. 'But' he assured the congregation, God's 'covenant with the elect is indissoluble, seeing it depends on God's eternal purpose, to make them persevere in his ways. The covenant of grace doth not run thus, *I will be their God, if they will be my people; but I will be their God and they shall be my people*'.¹¹ Covenant and election defined the people of God's identity through baptism. Members of the national Church, those baptized and professing the Christian faith, were not all viewed as regenerate or elect within the covenant of grace.

Typical of eighteenth-century Presbyterianism's exacting subscription to the *Westminster Confession*, baptism was hardly a disputed doctrine.¹² Baptism was ordained for 'admission into the visible Church' and as the exhibition of the gracious covenant, as a 'sign and seal' to the individual being baptized.¹³ The *Larger Catechism* further defined baptism. It designated that both sacraments were 'instituted by Christ in His Church to signify, seal, and exhibit unto those that are within the covenant of grace the benefits of His mediation.'¹⁴ In other words, it described a Sacrament as an instrument of grace, not merely a sign or means to grace. Thus, baptism is

¹⁰ Erskine, *People's Covenant*, 45-46.

¹¹ Willison, *Balm of Gilead*, 200-201.

¹² 'The Directory for the Publick Worship of God', in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1958; reprint, 2003), outlines baptism as well.

¹³ *WCF*, 28.1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, L.C.162.

a Sacrament...wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost to be a sign and seal of ingrafting into Himself, of remission of sins by His blood, and regeneration by His Spirit; of adoption and resurrection unto everlasting life; and whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible Church, and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's.

This 'engagement' to be 'the Lord's' connected baptism and admission into the visible Church with covenant duties of Christian obedience.¹⁵

The *Larger Catechism's* definition of baptism was remarkable for its emphasis on obligations arising out of its practice. It likened these obligations to 'engagements' contracted in baptism 'to be improved upon' throughout the course of the Christian life. It further noted the importance of making a 'solemn vow' when 'improving' on one's baptism.¹⁶ Such language led many to designate the Sacrament as a 'baptismal covenant', and as something that necessitated diligence in faith.¹⁷ Similarly, the *Directory for Worship* instructed ministers to 'admonish' parishioners 'To look back to their baptism; to repent of their sins against their covenant with God; to stir up faith; to improve and make right use of their baptism, and of the covenant sealed thereby betwixt God and their souls'.¹⁸ Therefore, it was hoped that baptised children would, in due course, personally accept the covenant of grace when reminded of their baptismal obligations.¹⁹ In 1706, the General Assembly felt compelled to reinforce this. Its *Act* of that year directed ministers 'to take as strict a trial as can be' for those 'they admit to the Lord's Supper' 'especially before their first admission thereto, and that they diligently instruct them...as to the covenant of grace and the nature and end of that ordinance as a seal thereof and charge upon their consciences, the obligations they lie under from their Baptismal covenant, and seriously exhort them to renew the same'.

¹⁵ Ibid., L.C.165.

¹⁶ Ibid., L.C.167.

¹⁷ Willison, *Lord's Day*, 182, Crawford, *Catechism*, 151, Gillies, *Historical Collections*, 223, Mason, *Observations*, 45.

¹⁸ 'Westminster Directory'. Calvin taught that baptism strengthened faith and 'engrafted' the believer into the death of Christ as part of the process of sanctification. Calvin also taught that faithful Christians who tethered themselves to the promise given in baptism could overcome the dominion of sin. J.T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles, ed., *Institutes*, 4.15.9-11.

¹⁹ Willison, *Balm of Gilead*, 148.

Two years later, the General Assembly enjoined ministers in their pastoral visitations to remind children ‘how they were dedicated in Baptism’ and ‘when of age’ and after ‘instruction’ on ‘the covenant of grace and the seals thereof, to invite them to engage themselves personally to the Lord, and to desire and prepare for and take the first opportunity they can of partaking of the Lord’s Supper [and] to be especially careful how they communicate...’²⁰ Yet, most significant was the *Larger Catechism*’s insistence that baptism was ‘not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized’.²¹ By virtue of baptism, children of professing Christians were recognized as members of the community of the covenanted people of God. This meant that they possessed first rights, or access, to the covenant of grace as it extended federally from regenerate Christians and to their posterity.

How the doctrine of election fit within the federal system was never questioned during the century. Presenting the covenant relationship between God and individuals within the framework of election was commonplace in evangelistic preaching.²² However, ministers rarely defined the covenant relationship between God and Church or even between God and the Scottish nation within the context of election.²³ This was an understood doctrinal formulation within seventeenth-century Scottish theology.²⁴

²⁰ AGA, 1706 Act XI.394, 1708 Act X.426-428.

²¹ WCF, L.C.166.

²² Webster, *Sacramental Sermons*. Willison, *Five Sermons*, Sermon II.29ff. The Seceders were no different. Their sermons were replete in linking covenant theology and election. Erskine, *Christ Considered*, Alexander Moncrieff, *The Duty of Contending for the Faith* (Edinburgh: Fleming and Company, 1732).

²³ One exception is Williamson, *Gospel-Method*, 74-5.

²⁴ This is a critical theological position within seventeenth and eighteenth-century Scottish theology that has scarcely received attention. Torrance, ‘Covenant or Contract?’ 70, glosses over the issue. Coffey, *Rutherford*, 165-169, noted that the relationship between federal theology and national covenants ‘is usually left vague’.

Most evangelicals cherished the high ideal of a national Church that remained pure in its doctrine and covenanted by profession.²⁵ Their understanding of a national Church rested on the doctrine of baptism, as did their assumptions of Scotland's covenanted status.

Evangelicals maintained that the covenant of grace was the Divine extension of salvation to those of the invisible Church, or elect in Christ. Yet, Scotland's federal theology differentiated how the covenant of grace extended both to elect and reprobate members of the visible Church.²⁶ Because of this, Scottish theology assumed an 'internal' and 'external' application of the covenant of grace.²⁷ According to this distinction, all members of the visible Church who profess faith in Christ and their baptised children participate in the covenant of grace's external benefits.²⁸ The benefits included immediate access to the preaching of the word and administration of the sacraments, along with proper Church discipline.²⁹ The *Directory* affirmed that baptism was necessary because, by their birth to Christian parents, children were 'federally holy before baptism'. Yet, 'the inward grace and virtue of baptism' was not connected with 'that very moment of time' when it was 'administered'. This made baptism 'not so necessary' for 'salvation'.³⁰ Through baptism,

²⁵ The national Church ideal, as pursued by the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians is developed in Chapter 6.

²⁶ Several notable Continental Post-Reformation theologians, who also influenced Scottish federal theology, distinguished between an internal and external covenant. Francis Turretin's (1623-1687) *Institutes of Eclenctic Theology*, Peter van Maastricht's (1630-1706) *Treatise on Regeneration*, and Herman Witsius, *Oeconomy of the Covenants*, vol.1 book iii.v; Johannes Markii's *Medulla*, and Benedict Pictet's (1655-1724) *Theologia Christiana* each developed the idea and found little difficulty with the articulation of national covenants as public confessions. It is little surprise that their works found favour within Scotland. See the Episcopalian satirical pamphlet *Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence*, where 'country' evangelical Presbyterians are mocked for their voracious appetite for Dutch federal theology. According to Ryken, *Fourfold State*, 15-21, Boston's theological library included the above names as well. The Associate Presbytery's theological students were trained with Johannes Markii's *Medulla*. The Antiburgher Synod's theological students continued to utilise Markii until the end of the century according to M'Kerrow, *History*, 778-780.

²⁷ This was articulated by Samuel Rutherford according to Coffey, *Rutherford*, 165-169.

²⁸ William Wilson, *A Defence of the Reformation-Principles of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: T. Lumisden and J. Robertson, 1739), 35. Wilson was outlining the WCF, 25.2-3, 26.2

²⁹ Calvin described this similarly. He noted that baptism 'engrafted' children into the visible church. Baptism testified that they had been 'born directly into the inheritance of the covenant'. J.T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles, ed., *Institutes*, 4.16.6-7,24. John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Henry Beveridge, trans. Christopher Fetherstone (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 1:159.

³⁰ 'Westminster Directory'.

Christian children entered into the covenant of grace and were obligated to participate in that covenant's community, the visible Church. Thus, baptism and profession of faith might place one *in* covenant with God insofar as establishing a connection to the vitality of Church community is concerned, but it did not necessarily imply that one was *of* the covenant by divine election. Eighteenth-century Presbyterians noted this important theological demarcation as they emphasized 'federal' 'obligations' that accompanied baptism. Thus, John Wilson's (c.1654-c.1719) *Catechism* could specify that 'Baptism' was 'not a meer[sic] Ceremony, or imposing a name, but an express covenanting with God'.³¹

James Fisher's famous *Catechism* elucidated 'federal' 'holiness'. He noted that 'children of professing parents' were 'born members of the visible church'. 'Federal holiness' 'entitles a child to baptism' in that 'it necessarily supposes a being within the covenant, in virtue of the credible profession of the parent, and consequently a right to the initiating seal thereof'. The covenant's 'seals' 'can never be applied to any, but such as are supposed to be in the covenant; nor can the privileges of the church be confirmed to any that are without the Church.' Fisher further detailed how baptism granted 'a right to covenant-blessings'.

Baptism was 'a declarative sign and seal of [covenant blessings], as circumcision was' to Old Testament Israel. 'The promise of the covenant, which is indorsed'[sic] to 'children' and 'parents' 'gives them a right' to the covenant's external blessings. The 'efficacy of baptism', therefore, consisted 'in sealing and ratifying the right to covenant blessings'. Fisher emphasized that baptism demonstrated God's 'infinite goodness' in 'appointing an initiating ordinance' which 'irreversibly' 'sealed' 'all the blessings of the covenant to the elect seed'.³²

John Spalding (1631-1699) of Dundee, whose published sacramental sermons were cherished by evangelicals,³³ observed that through baptism one entered into the visible covenant community because

³¹ John Wilson, *A Family Catechism...* (Edinburgh: James Watson, 1712), 122.

³² Fisher, *Shorter Catechism Explained*, 210-224.

³³ Philip, *Devotional Literature*, 16.

when your Fathers covenanted for you and in your name, and accepted of Christ at least visibly for themselves and you, and resigned you up to God, and now as at other times, so especially at a Communion ye are bound to ratifie in your own person, what was then done for you by another...Ye are in covenant with God by a visible external profession of the Truth, and subjecting of yourselves to Christ and to his Ordinances; for your very appearing here at thir[sic] Ordinances, is a visible external Covenanting with God. For as by the Lords giving you thir[sic] Ordinances, he says unto you, *I will be your God*; so ye by your attendance on them and subjection to them say, *And we will be thy people*. Yet this is not enough, for many that are thus in covenant with God, may and do go to Hell, for all are not Israel that are of Israel. And therefore...There must be personal inward and Soul-covenanting with God...³⁴

Spalding implied that all were not included in the covenant the same way. While some members of the visible Church accept their covenant responsibilities in a heart-felt, spiritual way, others would merely accept covenant responsibilities by an external profession of faith and therefore were only apparently in covenant. In an evangelistic sermon, James Webster similarly noted how only sincere faith 'brought one into the covenant of grace'. It was not merely the act of personal covenanting like those 'Written Covenants in Your coffers', he noted. Neither was it an 'External Covenanting in Baptism, that could be done without an Act of Faith, nor a Covenanting with a Visible Church'. Rather, entrance into the 'Everlasting Covenant' came only by 'Heart-Approbation and Entire Satisfaction with the Blessed device of Salvation'.³⁵ Ebenezer Erskine understood

all the Members of the visible Church...bear a Relation to the Covenant, *To them belong the Adoption, and the Covenants, and the Promises*; You are externally in Covenant by Virtue of Baptism, you are professedly covenanted People. But the Question is, are you really within the Covenant? Have you by Faith entered within the Rainbow that surroundeth the Throne?

He demanded his congregants ascertain 'whether or not' they were 'within' 'the Covenant'³⁶ since 'Salvation and Admission into the visible Church' remained a matter of faith that was extended through Divine election.³⁷ In the 1760s, John Brown of Haddington best summarized this aspect of covenant theology. 'God is the God of all Men by Creation and

³⁴ Spalding, *Synaxis Sacra*, 19.

³⁵ Webster, *Sacramental Sermons*, Sermon V, 60.

³⁶ Erskine, *Rainbow of the Covenant*, 58.

³⁷ Willison, *Five Sermons*, 30-31.

Providence; of all Church members by external covenant'. Yet 'God' was, 'the Father of true believers by regeneration and adoption'.³⁸

However, it is equally important to understand that the 'internal' and 'external' dimensions of the covenant of grace were not merely lofty theology. Ministers viewed this distinction as a pastoral aid during times of grief. It offered consolation when one pondered the eternal status of children who died before making a credible profession of faith. Thomas Boston's *Memoirs* included a touching letter of consolation to a pastoral colleague who had lost an infant child. Boston wrote from his own experience, 'having travelled that gloomy road six times'. Hoping to assuage his colleague's pain, he noted 'that God has other use for children than our own comfort; and use far more honourable and happy for them...so early carried off'. Yet, he noted how the covenant's promise 'likewise serves to let in to the sweetness of that word in particular, "I will be thy God, and the God of thy seed."...the next you see your child, you will see him shining white in glory, having been washed "in the blood of the lamb"...Oh how difficult is it to get our *hows* and *whys* crucified, and to resolve all into, and rest satisfied in, infinite wisdom tempered with covenant-love!'³⁹ Even as late as the 1770s, the Burgher theologian Archibald Hall agreed with Boston that the 'visible covenant-relation' to God gave children of professing believers 'dying in infancy' 'a reasonable ground for salvation'.

...For since they did not live so long, as to be capable of renouncing the gracious covenant, which God made with their parents, and with them, we may comfortably consider them, as in the hands of a *Covenant-God*, whose faithfulness engages him to continue to be so to them, that were not suffered to reject him by unbelief; and so, not to mention the great encouragement they would have to lay hold on God's covenant, were they to grow up to years of maturity, there is a vast difference between them, and the dying infants of unbelievers and Heathens, which must be left to the *uncovenanted* mercy of God; and what ground of hope there is in this, let those Christians consider, who would set aside God's promise of being *a God to his people, and their seed*, as having no relation of *Spiritual* privileges and benefits, *nor any place* under the gospel-dispensation.⁴⁰

³⁸ Brown, *Help for the Ignorant*, 204, 368. See also, Willison, *Balm of Gilead*, 240.

³⁹ Morrison, ed., *Boston's Memoirs*, 502.

⁴⁰ Hall, *Worship*, Vol.1.309-310.

With such an understanding of baptism as an external administration of the covenant of grace, it is easy to understand how ministers could refer to the 'Lord's people' as the intimate designation of a Christian covenanted with God, but who may or may not be internally in covenant with Christ. Perhaps this distinction aided in awakening souls that might have grown all too comfortable as baptised parishioners in a land believed to be intimately connected to God by covenant relationship. It did enable federal theology to be applied to the individual, the Church and the Scottish people.

The Visible Church and Covenanting

Ministers recognized that not all who had received baptism would manifest salvific grace as adults. However, most evangelicals believed that baptized children should be regarded in the judgement of charity as recipients of Divine grace until the contrary became evident.⁴¹ The gracious administration of the covenant controlled this distinction. John Warden (1671-1751), a Church of Scotland minister, detailed in 1724 that 'by federal holiness' 'we cannot understand Legitimacy; or surely, the Children of parents who are both of them Infidels, are not Bastards, more than those of professing Christians. Nor, are we to understand it of *inherent Holiness*, for tho' infants are certainly capable of this, yet all the Children of professing and believing Parents are not professed of this.' He understood 'Holiness' as covenantal. As 'believing' 'Parents' exhibited holiness, he concluded, 'so the Infants are according to the Tenor of God's Covenant, holy also; being now separated from the Infidel World, externally and visibly assumed into Covenant with God, dedicated to his Service, and for his Glory, capable of real Holiness' and 'partake of all the visible Privileges of his People'.⁴² Therefore, 'All members of a visible church' were '*federally* in covenant with God by...profession and baptism'.⁴³ This meant baptism only initiated membership into the visible, national Church of Scotland. Thomas Aytone (1694-1739), minister in Alyth near

⁴¹ Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, vi.

⁴² John Warden, *A Practical Essay on the Sacrament of Baptism* (Edinburgh: J. MacEuen, 1724), 82-83.

⁴³ Willison, *Five Sermons*, 30-31.

Dundee, argued against John Glas's rejection of a national Church and Covenants in the 1720s. In so doing, he stated:

Scotland was first brought in by the Preaching of the Gospel, and so their Seed and Offspring are still reputed members of the visible Church, and are under the Seal of the Covenant. When a Nation is thus brought in, and by a voluntary Condensation submit themselves to the laws of Christ, their Children are federally holy, and have a Right to all the external Privileges of the Covenant, unless they be cut off by some Moral or Physical Impediment: Thus the Children of Jews were all circumcised, even tho' their Parents were not to be accounted real Believers or visible Saints; and the Covenant under both Dispensations is substantially the same.⁴⁴

Aytone had articulated an important insight. The visible Church of Scotland was understood as the community of the covenant of grace, and the covenanted people of God.

Theoretically, this meant that a nation, with its majority confessing (Protestant) Christianity and baptized, necessitated national commitments to God.

Apart from individuals embracing the covenant of grace, Scotland still remained covenantally related to God under the covenant of works. Without internally accepting the covenant of grace relationship with God, a parishioner might embrace a national Covenant along with the majority of inhabitants in Scotland. However, a national Covenant, like that believed to have been transacted with Israel at Sinai, was only the covenant of grace's external application for the people of God as a whole. It included elect and reprobate alike. In the previous chapter, we observed how Scottish theology interpreted the Sinaitic covenant's purpose. It served as a reminder of the covenant obligations for God's people—both as a covenant of works and a covenant of grace. This understanding of entering the covenant of grace for salvation led to many pastoral warnings against 'covenanting' in 'legal' ways.⁴⁵ Theologically personal covenanting, that is, internally embracing the covenant of grace, had to precede national covenanting. This, of course, was not always the

⁴⁴ Thomas Aytone, *Review of Mr. Glass's Observes on the Original Constitution of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: John Patton, 1731), 6.

⁴⁵ Hamilton, *Catechism*, Preface, 16-18. Wilson, *Church's Extremity*, 12ff. Erskine, *People's Covenant*, 50. Morison, *Covenanting Catechism*, 12-13.

case. Those who were outside of the covenant of grace could indeed covenant as a nation insofar as they were members of the national Church.⁴⁶

Eighteenth-century ministers laboured in their evangelistic sermons to see corporate piety in Church and nation enhanced. A valiant defender of Scotland's Covenants in his sermons and treatises, John Willison cautiously described Scotland's covenanted status as he evangelized in the 1720s. 'There is more', he preached, 'than being *Nationally* in Covenant with God, by virtue of a solemn transaction enter'd into' by 'Rulers, Nobles, Ministers, and Representatives of a Land; whereby they, with the Consent of the whole Nation, bind and engage themselves and their Posterity to the Lord'. However, like 'the Nation of the *Jews*', whose 'National Covenants did not entitle them to saving Blessings...', 'Many' were in Israel's national Covenant 'that never came to be in a gracious state, tho' yet they received many special Favours and Deliverances upon the account of it. So we in this Land have the Honour of being *Nationally* in Covenant with God, which indeed is our Glory...and the Ground of many National Mercies and Deliverances.' However, concluded Willison, 'it is not the Spring of saving Mercies, nor that which entitles us' to salvation. 'Many' he believed, professed 'to own' Scotland's '*National Covenant*' but had 'never [taken] Hold of the Covenant of Grace' inwardly, or 'gave themselves to God'.⁴⁷ Like biblical Israel, the visible Church was seen as the chosen people of God, comprising elect and reprobate alike. Scotland's Covenants were non-salvific like Israel's (Sinaitic) covenant. They included all members of the visible, national Church. The internal covenant of grace was for the elect, the broader external covenant extended national 'Mercies' to the nation. Indeed, as a safeguard, the National Covenant of 1638 incorporated this idea when it urged subscribers to renew their personal covenants with God.⁴⁸ The heavy emphasis on personal covenanting

⁴⁶ Samuel Rutherford argued this. Coffey, *Rutherford*, 165-168.

⁴⁷ Willison, *Five Sermons*, 31.

⁴⁸ *Confession of Faith of the Church of Scotland, or the National Covenant*, (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian, Reprint, 2003), 353.

demonstrates that Scottish theology assumed a covenant concept that incorporated the external covenant for the nation.

Scotland's national Church ideal included the gracious covenant's 'internal' and 'external' conceptions. The national Church was a visible Church that included invisible Church members. Eighteenth-century evangelicals assumed that national covenanting bound Scotland's Church with God when individuals united together as the corporate/ecclesiastical representatives of the nation who professed the true Presbyterian religion.⁴⁹ The Seceders maintained that

when the Church is viewed as the believing mystical Body of Christ, she is then considered as under the internal Dispensation of the Grace of the Covenant. Again, when the Church is viewed as a visible professing Body, she is then considered as under the external Administration of the Covenant of Grace, making an outward credible Profession of the Truths of the Gospel, and giving an outward Subjection unto the Ordinances of Christ, particularly the Government and Discipline.

They also maintained 'That tho' every particular Church stands in Relation unto the Catholick Body as a *Part* unto the *Whole*, yet every particular Church, whether National or Presbyterian, may be considered as a visible Body, in respect of its own Members, Order and Government'.⁵⁰ While emphasizing the *Confession*,⁵¹ Wilson defended the Seceders' position against accusations that they created schism within the national Church. The Seceders believed that because the 'Established Church' had not remained loyal to the 'covenanted' and 'Reformation' 'principles' as outlined in the national Covenants, it had, by its own apostasy, become schismatic within itself.⁵² The Seceders were hopeful that the visible Church could be reformed. Their aspirations were for a pure Church, free of Erastianism and true to their historic interpretation of covenanted Presbyterianism. By a 'pure' Church, the Seceders' did not envision a visible Church comprised of the elect only. They envisioned a truly 'Reformed Church'—openly covenanted—that fulfilled past

⁴⁹ Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 189-190.

⁵⁰ Wilson, *Defence of Reformation-Principles*, 279.

⁵¹ WCF.25.1-6

⁵² Wilson, *Defence of Reformation-Principles*, 76ff, 279-280.

expectations of purity of 'doctrine', 'worship', 'discipline' and 'government'.⁵³ Hence, holiness was conceived of as implementing a pure Presbyterian Church in doctrine, worship, discipline and government.

Thomas Bell's comments further clarify the relationship between baptism, the visible Church and covenanting. A Church of Scotland minister, he argued prior to the 1750s 'that a national covenant is as lawful as a national church'. For Bell, national covenanting remained valid because of baptism's significance to the national Church ideal. He insisted that 'To admit the lawfulness of the one, [while] denying that of the other' was 'an inconsistency'. He appealed to the *Shorter Catechism*, asserting that 'Every church is virtually in covenant with God' because 'baptism' 'doth signify and seal, not only our interest in the covenant of grace, but also our engagement to be the Lord's'. He concluded,

Now, if every individual be engaged to be the Lord's why may not the whole, as one body engage in the most public and explicit manner to be for him, and not for another? Is it the oath that terrifies? Can there be an oath more lawful; can there be one as honourable, as that whereby we swear allegiance to the God of all grace? Shall it be lawful for subjects to swear allegiance to their king, and not for Christians to their God? They do not swear what is impossible for them to perform...that they will perfectly obey his law; but that they will continue in their fidelity to him, and not apostatize from...his ways. Nor do they swear this in their own strength, but in that which is in Christ Jesus...Their promissory oath is grafted onto God's promise to them...I candidly confess, that to me it appears strange, to maintain the lawfulness of national Confessions of Faith, and deny that of national Covenants. National Confession is in effect a national Covenant...⁵⁴

The Antiburgher minister Archibald Mason, maintained in 1799 that covenanting obligations extended to future generations because baptism was the Church's primary covenant obligation. 'The obligation of religious vows and oaths extends to posterity...from which the Scriptures bestow upon the church's covenants with God. They are called an *everlasting covenant, Isa.xxiv.5. and a perpetual covenant, Jer.I.5*. These covenants are called [such] because their obligation is durable and permanent, and extends to future generations'.

Hence, Mason argued that,

⁵³ Ibid., 38-39. Carson has wrongly assumed that the Seceders' quest for a 'pure' Church meant a Church with elect Christians only. This, he maintained, stemmed from their adherence to covenant theology which confused the visible and invisible Church. Carson, 'The Doctrine of the Church in the Secession', 148, 162ff, 306-310, 334.

⁵⁴ Bell, *Standard*, 222-223.

The obligation of public covenants...may also be established from the nature of the ordinance of baptism...[where] the members of the church do not come under obligations for themselves only, but they bring their children also, under very solemn obligations, which partake of the nature of a covenant with God, or an oath unto him, and which they are bound to fulfil all the days of their life. Now, if an individual Christian may, according to the ordinance and law of God, bring his children, acting as their deputed-governor and representative, under moral obligations to duty, which shall bind them, in the baptismal covenant; may not a generation of Christians, according to the divine ordinance and law, bring the following age, whose deputed governors and representatives they are, under solemn-bonds to be the Lord's people, by covenanting with God...?

'The whole of the rising generation' who belonged to the visible Church, concluded Mason, were 'actually brought under solemn obligations' simply 'of their parents' through baptism. Therefore, 'if they may do this in a solitary capacity, why not a company of them, in a social state, bring their posterity under similar bonds, in the ordinance of public covenanting? It is impossible to acknowledge the lawfulness of the one, without discerning, at the same time, the moral fitness and necessity of the other.'⁵⁵ Mason's arguments came during controversy when 'New Light' enabled the validity of the Secession Churches' Covenant subscription and role of the magistracy in religious matters to be questioned.⁵⁶ Only a minority continued to agree with Mason's conclusions.

By the century's end many were not pleased with these intricate theological connections between baptism and the Covenant idea. There were 'objectors' to covenanting who maintained that the sacraments 'supercede[d]' National Covenants. Appealing to historic precedent, the Antiburgher James Ramsay argued in 1779:

Now *reformed* divines have tenaciously held, that the children of professing parents are *born* members of the visible church; and of consequence, that baptism is no more, in respect of the church, than a public acknowledgment or declaration of their membership. It must be so, if we grant that they are *foederally* holy, or externally related to God's covenant from their earliest infancy, and derive their membership thro' the profession and membership of their parents. Upon which principle alone it is, that they can have a right to baptism at all. It is plainly taught in Scripture... and to deny it must be exceedingly dangerous.⁵⁷

Ramsay never revealed who denied the doctrine of 'foederal-holiness'. However, his concerns were well-founded. An Antiburgher missionary licentiate, James Watt, wrote two

⁵⁵ Mason, *Observations*, 44-46.

⁵⁶ This will be discussed in Chapters 6

⁵⁷ James Ramsay, *Review of a Late Publication, Intituled, a Compendious View of The...Synod of Relief* (Glasgow: J.Bryce, 1779), 227,28-29.

pamphlets in the mid-1790s opposing several Presbyterian doctrines and what he saw as a general uncharitable spirit within the Secession Churches. He first challenged the Antiburghers on 'the magistrate's power in matters of religion'. In response, the Antiburgher's Glasgow Synod 'suspended' his license. Amazingly, the Synod subsequently granted him leniency and found common ground with him 'on religious liberty'. But then, as the Synod was about to 'restore him' and 'his license', Watt issued another pamphlet directly to the Synod. Even more theologically critical, it was directed at the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians' 'covenanted principles'. The Antiburghers now 'pronounced' upon him 'the sentence of lesser excommunication'.⁵⁸

Watt had argued in the offending pamphlet that discontinuity existed between the Old and New Testament 'economies' and therefore between Israel and the Church. He denied that there was any 'strong proof for a religious connection between Church and State, as for Infant-baptism; and for the obligation of National Covenants, as of baptismal vows on posterity: The latter, as well as the former, being founded on arguments taken from the Old Testament oeconomy. This led to inquiry; for as it seemed clear that the former was without foundation, if it be true, the later must be given up'. Watt denied federal theology's corporate dimensions. This left Watt with a bold query—'what is church-membership? For Watt it was 'a relation incompetent to an infant', for he questioned the covenantal dimensions behind paedobaptism:

How is it that such persons, thus owned as church-members even when adult, will not be admitted to full Communion by the same church without a new profession of faith? By baptism they are owned members of the visible church, and yet evidently do not, in consequence, obtain one privilege in the visible church, save exemption from baptism when they grow up.

'The parent professes his own faith', he argued, 'as proof of his child's interest, not in the covenant of grace, but in the external dispensation of this covenant; and with respect to procuring admission into this external dispensation, the parents faith and profession are

⁵⁸ M'Kerrow, *History*, 377.

vicarious.' 'Thus', chided Watt, 'the child becomes and remains, till he obtains admission to the Lord's supper, invisibly a member of the visible church'. Obviously, Watt disagreed with paedobaptism. 'But supposing for a moment', he questioned, 'that an external covenant did still exist' and 'that baptism and the Supper were the seals of it; and infants of believing parents included in it', 'it would not follow that infants are therefore, to receive these seals'. Baptism, he argued, 'must be received with faith, and the Lord's Supper with discernment of the Lord's body'. 'And if an interest in the covenant entitled to baptism, the same interest would entitle infants to the Lord's supper.' Thus, Watt concluded that 'to suppose an external covenant, into which persons are born by carnal pedigree, tarnishes the glorious accomplishment of the promise, and opposes the word of God'. Watt's arguments were representative of a broader evangelicalism that began to emerge in the eighteenth-century's later decades, and that opposed federal theology's corporate elements. Watt also demonstrated a new willingness among Secession divinity students to question both the national Church ideal and the *Confession's* 'language' on 'the power of the civil Magistracy in matters of religion'.⁵⁹

While Watt's arguments were significant, ministers of the Relief Synod in the 1770s began to raise the sharpest criticisms against Scotland's older form federal theology. They rejected covenanting because they felt the sacraments accomplished the same objectives for piety. In 1780, David Walker the Antiburgher minister of Pollockshaws, near Glasgow, contested the claim of the Relief theologian Patrick Hutchison that the sacraments accomplished the same ends as the Seceders' covenanting. The previous year, Hutchison had maintained that 'all' 'the apostolic churches' 'gave themselves to the Lord' through 'belief' in 'Christ and obedience to his law, and in baptism and the Holy Supper'. Moreover, he asserted that 'no man can prove, that giving themselves to the Lord was by expressly swearing any

⁵⁹ James Watt, *Plain Proof...* (Glasgow: D.Niven, 1796), 137,157-160,150. Watt wrote several lengthy pamphlets against Presbyterian doctrine and worship that were published in Dublin, London, and Edinburgh. His arguments focus primarily on the Seceders, whom he regarded as of the most radical and conservative brand. Apparently, Watt became a Congregationalist.

Covenant'.⁶⁰ In response to this, Walker argued that since the sacraments were 'moral duties' rooted in the Old Testament practices of circumcision and the Passover feast, then covenanting should also be treated as a moral duty of 'perpetual obligation'. Walker maintained 'That one great end of these ordinances' was for 'Christians' to 'dedicate themselves to the service of God.' 'The word of God...lays us under an indispensable divine obligation to cleave to him and his service; we have also come under numerous voluntary engagements, to be for him and not for another'. For the Seceders, intimate 'Engagements' such as 'baptism' and 'the sacramental Supper' were no less important than 'the solemn' Covenants of their 'godly ancestors' which remained 'binding' and gave meaning to the Christian life in Scotland. Unfortunately for Walker, he knew how 'little' his evangelical contemporaries 'considered the inviolable obligation of the divine law'. He acknowledged that 'it is nothing strange, although the numerous engagements we have come under', that covenantal piety 'should have very little influence' any more.⁶¹ Just like the sacraments, covenanting was primarily a religious rite. Covenanting was a declining form of piety held by a minority who still clung to Scotland's older federal theology.

Many have overlooked how federal theology drew together the national Church ideal, baptism, and election. The historian David Stevenson has implied that the ideal of a pure national Church, as conceived by federal theology, led to the Scottish Church's afflictions of 'the later seventeenth and eighteenth-century Secessions'. Yet, Stevenson oversimplified how federal theology incorporated election with the ideal of a covenanted nation. Stevenson argued that because of the successes of the 1638 Covenanting revolution, 'Rutherford' and other 'radicals' hoped that 'the visible and invisible churches might coincide' 'trying to set up on earth an exclusive Church, approximating as far as possible to the "invisible church", which contained only the elect.' This, he noted was simply the cultivation of the ideal that

⁶⁰ Patrick Hutchison, *Compendious View of the Religious System, Maintained by the Synod of Relief* (Falkirk: D.Reid, 1779), 33.

⁶¹ David Walker, *Morality and Obligation of Public Religious Vows, or Covenants, Illustrated* (Glasgow: W.Smith, 1780), 67-76, 39.

'Scotland was an elect nation.'⁶² Stevenson misunderstood how federal theology connected election with the covenant of grace's internal and external dimensions.⁶³ This theology was not disregarded by eighteenth-century ministers until the 'New Light' disputes of the 1790s.

John Carson has also asserted that the concept of a covenanted nation could not fit with covenant theology's doctrine of election. Carson attempted to prove that covenant theology itself undermined the Seceders' doctrine of the Church because it exhibited 'Christological' and 'Nestorian' heresies. He asserted that 'The Seceders' doctrine of Church membership evidenced contradictions at many significant points'. However, he failed to produce primary sources that demonstrated such an incompatibility existed within the Secession's theology. He did not clearly discern that the external administration of the covenant of grace only extended membership to the visible Church by baptism.⁶⁴ Rather, it was the internal administration of the covenant of grace that extended salvific grace to all who by nature were under the condemnatory covenant of works. According to the federal system, a baptised parishioner was related to the covenant of grace outwardly as a member of the visible Church. In terms of salvation, however, a visible Church member had to appropriate the covenant of grace. Carson's allegation that the Seceders' federal theology contained contradictions and heresy might be a valid theological criticism from a Barthian perspective which rejected federal theology on the whole.⁶⁵ However, the Seceders' contemporary critics, from the Reformed Presbyterians to the Independents, neither accused them of such

⁶² David Stevenson, 'The Radical Party in the Kirk, 1637-45', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 25 (1974): 162-165.

⁶³ Following John Coffey's description of Rutherford's view of an internal and external covenant of grace, Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism*, 296-298, has illustrated that that an 'inward' and 'outward' distinction existed among Rutherford's contemporaries, particularly in the writings of Robert Baillie, Alexander Henderson, and Archibald Johnston's of Wariston. However, Mullan viewed such a distinction of the covenant of grace 'subdivided to accommodate the treatment of the nation in covenanting theology'. Unfortunately, Mullan did not elaborate further. This area of seventeenth-century Scottish and Puritan theology is in need of research.

⁶⁴ Carson, 'The Doctrine of the Church in the Secession', 9, 148-166, 342.

⁶⁵ Karl Barth, *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions* (1923), trans. D.L. Guder and J.J. Guder, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2002), 134-136, 150-151., See also Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract?', Torrance, 'Covenant Concept', Torrance, 'Strengths and Weaknesses'.

inconsistencies nor charged them with heresy. Scotland's national Church ideal incorporated the external distinction of the covenant of grace consistent with Post-Reformation federal theology.⁶⁶ Only in opposition to national covenanting in the late eighteenth century was any criticism raised against internal and external distinctions of the covenant of grace. Such criticisms came from those embracing broadening evangelical views within the dissenting denominations who had gradually given up on the sustainability of a national Church ideal. Throughout the eighteenth century, preaching focused on individuals embracing the covenant of grace. Covenanting's polemicists sharply distinguished between the covenant of grace and national Covenants. This was why they belaboured conversion as the prerequisite to establishing covenanting duties.

Communion

Like baptism, the Lord's Supper embodied covenantal imagery. Typical of the Reformed tradition, evangelicals viewed Communion as the high feast of the Christian life. However, Scottish Communion expressed pronounced emphases on covenant piety. It was at Communion that personal covenants were often made or renewed. It also was at Communion celebrations where corporate Covenant obligations were consecrated. Communion were a corporate participation in the body and blood of Christ and where public professions of faith transpired. John Spalding's Communion sermons from the 1690s, instructed his Dundee parishioners that 'If they 'would be worthy communicants', they 'must enter into a personal covenant with God'. Spalding assumed that his hearers were included within the covenant 'in baptism, when your Fathers covenanted for you...and accepted of Christ at least visibly for themselves and you'. However, it was 'especially at a Communion' where parishioners were 'bound to ratifie' in their 'own person, what was then done' by Christ. According to Spalding, parishioners were 'in covenant with God by a

⁶⁶ For example, see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Eclenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburgh, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), 3.9, 3.13, 3.23, 2.606.

visible external profession' and 'their very appearing' at the sacramental season only demonstrated 'visible external covenanting with God'. This was the formal 'acknowledgment of the Divine promise "*I will be your God*". Moreover, 'participation' in the sacramental season signified parishioners' subjection to the terms of the covenant relationship, which included: "*And we will be thy people*". Yet Spalding was all too cautious that 'many' had erroneously established their salvation on outward profession. 'They' 'that are thus in covenant with God, may and do go to Hell, for all are not Israel that are of Israel'. Thus, Spalding reasoned 'there must be a personal inward and Soul-covenanting with God' and 'Communion' was the 'fair opportunity for it'.⁶⁷ Covenanting (individual and corporate) may have embodied federal theology's experiential realities, but it did so in painstaking ways.

The Lord's Supper was the capstone of covenant piety. It was the 'Covenant feast'.⁶⁸ Evangelicals especially associated it with Scotland's historic days of conversion and revival. Leigh Eric Schmidt's monumental study, *Holy Fairs*, has shed considerable light on Scotland's Communion seasons. Schmidt outlined the influence that such Communion seasons, or 'festivals', had in stimulating revivals in Scotland and the American frontier. He traced Scotland's Communion seasons back to Robert Bruce (1554-1631) in the 1590s. These Communion seasons, originating in Ayr, Kirkcudbright, Irvine, Lanark, and Kilsyth, were augmented with revivalist preaching. By the time of Scotland's 1638 Covenanting revolution, Communions had become well-established festivals of piety where 'religion and culture, Communion and community, piety and sociability combined. Regularly times of renewal and revival, they were the high days of the year'. Even more significant was Schmidt's identification of the correlation between the Lord's Supper and Scotland's history

⁶⁷ Spalding, *Synaxis Sacra*, 9.

⁶⁸ Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, Preface, vii, xii, 67, Ralph Erskine, *The Happy Hour of Christ's Quickenning Voice...1744* (Glasgow: G.Caldwell, 1789), 36.

of spiritual awakenings.⁶⁹ While Schmidt's study emphasized the Covenanting period's revivals and the mass Communion at Cambuslang and Kilsyth in 1742, it did not include the popular sacramental celebrations by the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians, nor Church of Scotland evangelicals who still upheld Scotland's Covenants. George Burnet's *Holy Communion* (1960) appropriately observed that 'Any history of the Sacrament in the Church of Scotland would be incomplete which omitted the influence of the dissenting bodies which broke away from the Mother Church'. However, Burnet showed scant respect for those 'dissenting bodies'. Instead he alleged how their 'bigotry' and haughty' attitudes were an impediment to frequent and proper Communion. Burnet also fell short in understanding the correlation between covenanting and Communion.⁷⁰ For those 'dissenting' groups, sacramental seasons and yearnings for national revival hinged on Scotland's historic Covenant relationship with God. Covenanting remained a significant feature of eighteenth-century evangelical Communion seasons.

Fearful of any semblance of Roman Catholicism, Scottish Presbyterianism rigidly followed the Westminster Assembly's position on the Lord's Supper. This remained the case for eighteenth-century evangelicals.⁷¹ Thus, 'Private masses, or receiving this Sacrament by a priest, or any other, alone; as likewise the denial of the cup to the people; worshipping the elements, the lifting them up, or carrying them about for adoration, and the reserving them for any pretended religious use' were 'contrary to the nature of this Sacrament, and to the institution of Christ.' The *Confession* found 'repugnant' the 'doctrine' of 'transubstantiation' which maintained the 'change of the substance of bread and wine, into the substance of Christ's body and blood' 'by consecration of a priest, or by any other way'

⁶⁹ Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 23-27, 3.

⁷⁰ George Burnet, *Holy Communion in the Reformed Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), 233-237.

⁷¹ See, Willison, *Sacramental Catechism. Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 112-113. It is interesting that Roxburgh, *Gillespie*, 153-157, demonstrates that Gillespie followed the WCF on the Lord's Supper but never acknowledges his dependence on it. Instead he highlighted Gillespie's connections with Calvin and the *Scots Confession*.

which it viewed as ‘the cause of manifold superstitions’ and ‘gross idolatries’. It also denied the Lutheran position of consubstantiation that maintained the body and blood of Christ were ‘corporally or carnally in, with, or under the bread and wine’. ‘Worthy receivers’ ‘outwardly’ received ‘the visible elements’ ‘inwardly by faith’ but ‘not carnally and corporally’. This meant that a Christian ‘spiritually’ received ‘Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death’ ‘yet as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses’.⁷² Accordingly, the *Confession* insisted that the Lord’s Supper manifested the ‘perpetual remembrance’ and ‘commemoration’ of Christ’s death. Most significant, the Lord’s Supper was ‘the seal of the gospel covenant wherein all the benefits of the new covenant are signified, sealed, and applied to Christians’.⁷³ This made the Lord’s Supper ‘spiritual nourishment’ for ‘believers’. The Supper was a ‘further engagement in and to all duties which [Christians] owe unto him’ and thus was a ‘bond and pledge of their Communion with him’ and with other Christians. As a profession of union with Christ, Communion became a consecration of allegiance as a citizen of the heavenly kingdom. This was another connecting doctrine between covenanting and the sacraments.⁷⁴ While the *Confession*’s definition of the Lord’s Supper stood unquestioned throughout the century, the covenanting ceremony’s relationship to it did not.

Eighteenth-century ministers inherited their introspective sacramental piety from their predecessors.⁷⁵ Theologically, George Gillespie and Samuel Rutherford viewed the Lord’s Supper as a ‘confirming and sealing ordinance’, appointed to seal’ the Christian’s ‘interest in Christ and the covenant of grace which he already hath’. Therefore, the sacraments were ‘exhibitive signes’ for believers only. The Lord’s Supper was ‘nourishment’ for ‘those in whom Christ liveth’ by empowering their converted life through increasing ‘a new degree of

⁷² *WCF*, 29.4,6-7.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 29.1, LC.162,SC.92.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.1-2.

⁷⁵ Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 11ff.

faith'. This view, developed from Calvin,⁷⁶ trickled down into the eighteenth-century heirs of covenanting as well. It connected the Sacrament's efficacy with sanctification which encouraged Christian growth in faith and holiness.⁷⁷ Beyond their standard Post-Reformation theology, Rutherford and David Dickson's Communion sermons evidenced strong evangelistic and revival themes.⁷⁸ Moreover, both men were involved in the revivals of Scotland's southwest in 1630, something that John Livingston (1603-1672) both participated in and documented.⁷⁹ Schmidt has shown that the *Five Articles of Perth* had the effect of making the Lord's Supper 'a vehicle of protest and solidarity' which 'helped prepare the way' for the 1638 'Presbyterian awakening' which received 'much of its energy from sacramental occasions'.⁸⁰ The theology and historical legacies of Scotland's sacramental seasons lingered in the memories of eighteenth-century covenanting stalwarts. They also created what became an unachievable expectation that Secession and Reformed Presbyterians nurtured throughout the century.

Scotland's Communion services were generally held twice a year between May and October. The infrequent celebration of Communion is thought to have emerged from the seventeenth-century's tumultuous middle decades, when Presbyterians retreated under both Oliver Cromwell's dictatorial rule over the General Assembly and Episcopacy's re-establishment under Charles II. The practice developed when parishes that lacked Presbyterian clergy grouped together for sacramental celebrations. By the 1660s many loyal Presbyterians who

⁷⁶ J.T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles, ed., *Institutes*, 4.17.5,2,6.

⁷⁷ Neither Rutherford nor Gillespie elaborated on a formal Scottish Sacramental theology. Both discussed the Sacrament in the midst of their polemical discussions on Church government. Samuel Rutherford, *Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication* (London: John Field, 1646), 521-23, 340, 253. George Gillespie, *Aaron's Rod Blossoming, or, the Divine Ordinance of Church Government Vindicated* (London: 1646), 502, 524, 500.

⁷⁸ Samuel Rutherford, *Fourteen Communion Sermons*, ed. Andrew Bonar (Glasgow: C.Glass & Company, 1877). David Dickson, *Select Practical Writings*, reprint ed. (Edinburgh: John Grieg, 1845), 75-197.

⁷⁹ John Livingston, *Brief Historical Relations* (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1848), 69ff. For an invaluable study that includes seventeenth-century Scottish Sacramental thought, see Bryan D Spinks, *Sacraments, Ceremonies and the Stuart Divines: Sacramental Theology and Liturgy in England and Scotland, 1603-1662* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

⁸⁰ Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 27.

rejected and feared Episcopalian rule ceased to worship in their churches. Instead, they chose to assemble in secret outdoor venues, particularly during sacramental occasions.⁸¹ Thus, the late seventeenth-century conventicle experience inspired eighteenth-century evangelical sacramental seasons. Even the 'habit of travelling great distances to be present at Communion' lingered long among the Cameronians' helping them to preserve the practice of 'protracted' sacramental occasions.⁸² The experiential religion produced by these conventicles attached a deep sentimentality to seventeenth-century worship that connected the historic days of (Presbyterian) revival with sacramental celebrations and national covenanting. This has led Michael Crawford to conclude that because of the seventeenth-century's 'Presbyterian conventicles', the sacramental season became 'a regular feature of Scottish religious culture' in 'the two decades following the Glorious Revolution and the reestablishment of Presbyterianism'.⁸³ With the birth of the Secession Church in 1733 and the unifying of the 'United Societies' into the Reformed Presbytery in 1743, the legacy of sacramental seasons received further rejuvenation. Outdoor worship, exemplified by lengthy prayers of confession and supplication, and multiple sermons from several ministers remained a significant feature of eighteenth-century piety, which also stimulated the evangelical interest with covenantal obligations.

Outdoor preaching events drew 'great concourses of people' from neighbouring parishes and beyond. According to Schmidt, 'long vigils of prayer, powerful experiences of conversion and confirmation, a number of popular ministers cooperating for extended services over three days or more, a season focus on summer, and unusually large numbers of communicants at successive tables' marked these events. These events ingrained in popular and clerical thought powerful recollections that connected Communion with revival.⁸⁴ For evangelicals, Communion was associated with valorous deeds of piety and events lauded by

⁸¹ Burnet, *Communion*, 183-200.

⁸² Hutchison, *R.P. History*, 228.

⁸³ Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 103.

⁸⁴ Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 24.

providential magnitude like Scotland's subscription to the Covenants. In 1705, James Webster hoped to inspire those seated at 'the Communion tables' in this manner. 'God speaks His Love' in a multitude of ways, he preached. 'His Divine-love' is shown through 'Sermons, Powerful Sacraments, Powerful Providences' and even making known the 'National-Manifestations, when He pitys a Land, in a Civil and Political Capacity, in a Evangelick Capacity. O! that God would Surprize *Scotland and Edinburgh*... with His Gracious Discoveries' of heartfelt repentance.⁸⁵ The persecution experienced by the Covenanters during the 'Killing Times' of the 1680s had infused with an already experiential Christian ritual an even richer spirituality.⁸⁶ The Seceders and the Reformed Presbyterians embraced these dimensions in their sacramental traditions. The nineteenth-century historian William McKelvie remarked that the early Seceders continued the outdoor sacramental celebrations 'partly' because they lacked the appropriate facilities for worship, but also 'partly because they knew that this mode of observing the ordinance accorded with the wishes' of many parishioners frustrated with the 'Established Church'. McKelvie attributed the Seceders' rapid growth to adhering to this old-style pattern of sacramental worship.⁸⁷

Outdoor sacramental occasions exerted a profound influence on Scottish piety. The immense popularity the Secession preachers, Ralph Erskine, Alexander Moncrieff, and Adam Gib, whose welcoming evangelical sermons infused with 'Marrow' doctrine, and the unknown mystique of a 'new' Church that re-developed the religion of the past, created mass attendances at Communion seasons. The Erskines' Communion services often were attended by thousands. Ralph's allegedly drew crowds of 4,000 to 5,000.⁸⁸ Adam Gib's Communion services were no different.⁸⁹ The 'United Societies' even alleged in 1740 that the 'Associate Presbytery was grossly Polluting' the 'Sacrament' 'by admitting...so many Thousands of

⁸⁵ Webster, *Sacramental Sermons*, Sermon IX.115, Erskine, *People's Covenant*, 5ff.

⁸⁶ William Wilson, *Sermons* (Edinburgh: David Duncan, 1748), 35, 3-51.

⁸⁷ Mackelvie, *Annals*, 126-127, 16.

⁸⁸ MacEwan, *The Erskines*, 30-49.

⁸⁹ *Scots Magazine*, XXVII June 14, 1765.

unfit and unworthy Communicants...who are generally ignorant' of their 'Covenant-breaking'.⁹⁰ The Reformed Presbytery's 1775 Communion 'at Sandhills' was said to have had in attendance 'ten to fifteen thousand at different periods of the day'.⁹¹

Covenant Preparation—Catechesis

Those most concerned with federal theology furthered the solemnity surrounding Communion by publishing sacramental manuals that bolstered respect for covenanting piety.⁹² This was a practice influenced by seventeenth-century Puritanism.⁹³ Catechisms were primarily directed to facilitating piety rather than engaging in Presbyterian polemics. They did not, however, entirely neglect the later.⁹⁴ Evangelicals were interested in communicants' being knowledgeable and conversant in covenant theology, which often included notions of ecclesiastical and national commitments.⁹⁵ Catechisms provided a means to accomplishing this goal.⁹⁶ Catechisms repudiated ideas of open Communion. Only those in covenant and prepared for Communion could rightly participate. Catechesis educated the laity in federal theology and sought to convert them through it. In 1705 James Hog asserted that 'it hath pleased' the Lord through 'the Gospel-Covenant' 'to ensure unto his Children the Influences and Conduct of his Word and Spirit, to be continued with

⁹⁰ *Declaration of the True Presbyterians within the Kingdom of Scotland, against the Pretended Associate Presbytery...* ([Linlithgow?]: 1740), 31.

⁹¹ Hutchison, *R.P. History*, 228.

⁹² See for examples, Wilson, *Catechism*. Hamilton, *Catechism*, Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*. L. W., *Father's Catechism...Better Understanding the Assembly's Catechism*. Crawford, *Catechism*, Brown, *Help for the Ignorant*, Brown, *Two Short Catechisms*, Muckarsie, *Catechism*, Morison, *Covenanting Catechism*, Fisher, *Shorter Catechism Explained*, Oliphant, *Catechism*. Puritan catechisms also influenced eighteenth-century Scotland: Matthew Henry, *Communicant's Companion...Instructions...For the Right Receiving of the Lord's Supper* (Edinburgh: 1704), was reprinted multiple times: 1714, 1737, 1747, 1778, 1792. John Flavel, *Sacramental Meditations...* reprint ed. (Edinburgh: 1729).

⁹³ See, Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

⁹⁴ Hamilton, *Catechism*, 17-19.

⁹⁵ Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, xxi. Fisher, *Shorter Catechism Explained*, 77-78.

⁹⁶ By the end of the century, few new catechisms were published. Of the few that were, there is a noticeable absence of the once pervasive commitment to the covenant idea. See for example, Alexander Duncan, *The Devout Communicant's Assistant...The Lord's Supper Explained, and the Obligations to Partake of It Considered* (Edinburgh: Elliott, 1777).

them'.⁹⁷ John Willison's influential *Catechism*, first published in 1720, maintained the same. He promoted personal and national covenanting. But his priority was that 'All Christians' 'study' to 'have distinct Uptakings of the Gospel Covenant' for participating in the Lord's Supper, 'which' he asserted was the Compend and Seal' of the 'Covenant'. Thus, 'in special Manner *young Persons* before their first Admission to it, when they are hereby, in a solemn and explicit Manner, to renew their Baptismal Bonds, and give their voluntary Consent to the Covenant'.⁹⁸ Through catechesis, the doctrinal connections of the covenant idea were passed on to generations of Scots.

Sacramental Sermons

Evangelical Communion sermons frequently combined two potent motifs: covenantal holiness and evangelistic proclamation.⁹⁹ Because the gravity of the Sacrament was expressed in covenantal terms, preparation was important for 'proper' celebration. For James Hog, 'in order to maintaining the Ordinance in Purity', proper 'Administration and Reception' was 'necessary'. This meant that 'the Covenant of Grace be rightly understood' from the Bible. If 'the Covenant itself be Mistaken', claimed Hog, 'the whole Conduct' of Communion would 'run upon false Grounds' thereby 'ruining' it. Since Communion was a 'Sacrament of the Gospel-Covenant', its 'Seals cannot be reputed to belong unto any but who are in a state of Grace, and have experienced in some measure...the most essential promises of the Covenant'.¹⁰⁰ Thomas Halyburton's Communion sermons, published in 1721, emphasized similar themes. The 'Fullness of Provision in the Covenant' was 'the Ground of the saints Stability, and their Happiness'. Halyburton also insisted that God's elect in Scotland needed their souls awakened. The 'Grace of the Covenant' was extended to

⁹⁷ James Hog, *Some Select Notes, Towards Detecting a Covered Mixture of the Covenant of Works and of Grace...* (Edinburgh: James Watson, 1705), 9.

⁹⁸ Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, Preface, V. Cf. Moncrieff, *Observations*, 13-17, 22.

⁹⁹ This is also noted by Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 5 (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 477. Old's study especially highlights Boston and Willison.

¹⁰⁰ Hog, *Mixture*, 29, 52.

Scotland, 'the Israel of God', who he had hoped would become a 'returning Penitent People of God'. He further designated the Lord's Supper as the 'Feast' 'designed' to 'strengthen them' 'who have the Life of Grace'. But it also would 'recover those who are decay'd' and 'revive their Spirits'.¹⁰¹ Scottish Communion services were designed around the spiritual feasting of the Lord's people and where the reviving of holiness fell under the covenantal rubric.

While numerous Communion sermons detailed the intensely covenantal character of the Sacrament as a seal of holiness for the elect, others presented it as a symbol of salvation to Scotland's unregenerate. Covenant was the resounding theme of James Webster's Communion services. His sermons demonstrate how ministers emphasized personal and corporate holiness at the Sacrament. 'This Covenant is called a Holy Covenant; his Word is Holy, his Works Holy, his Peoples Holy, but Holiness in its Brightest Beams dart forth here'. Webster pleaded, 'O trust the Covenant and Christ, want ye a Frame, want ye a Disposition, Look to the Covenant, Plead the Covenant, Ignorance of the Covenant makes Persons have many Doubts, and many Scruples, if a Man had a Right view of it, he could Answer all doubts, now ye that are Covenanting, or have Covenanted; I give you the Communion: *In the same Night in which our Lord was betrayed...*' After serving the Sacrament, Webster warned: 'Take heed how ye Subscribe', 'Covenant with him for the Cross [salvation], as well as for the Crown' [holiness]. Webster urged that covenantal commitments stimulated holiness. 'Make a Covenant with your eyes, that they shall not be Fire-glasses to inward Corruption' and 'look to Idols again; Make a Covenant with your Mouth, never to swear again, make a Covenant with your hands, never to do an ill thing again; make a Covenant with your Feet, never to run a black way again!' Hence, by preaching to the converted, Webster encouraged personal and corporate holiness. He also assured communicants that the covenant relationship with Christ was 'full and Satisfying', removing 'Doubts', 'Fears', thwarting 'Temptations', because 'the covenant...Conquers all Difficulties, Subdues all Enemies' and

¹⁰¹ Thomas Halyburton, *Five Sermons before and after the Lord's Supper* (Edinburgh: J. M'Euan, 1721), iv.87-88, 96.

‘Mortifies all Corruptions’.¹⁰² In another Communion sermon, Webster urged parishioners to ‘try thy Covenant-walk’. This ‘Walk’ he described, shall be in the sight of a Covenanted God’ so that ‘A Covenanter’s Walk’ remained ‘Upright’, ‘circumspect’, and above all ‘Constant’ so that the Christian ‘first’ in God’s way’.¹⁰³

When rightly ‘prepared’ the ‘Lord’s people’, were encouraged to bask in the ‘glories’ of the gracious covenant. Commonly, this theme was proclaimed ‘on the Monday after the celebration of the Lord’s Supper’.¹⁰⁴ Ministers offered communicants ‘covenant assurances’ of their ‘union with Christ’, while reminding them how ‘covenant Promises’ within their possession produced holiness.¹⁰⁵ This was exemplified in Communion sermons published in 1729 by William McGeorge (1668-1745). McGeorge fittingly noted the Sacrament’s purpose: ‘To comfort such serious tender and exercised Souls, whose Hearts are bleeding in the Sense of their own Unworthiness...’ His congregants were then urged to ‘come to this Feast’, ‘for healing and strengthening as well as for Nourishment’.¹⁰⁶ Secession and Reformed Presbyterians continued these same motifs, working to deepen their congregations’ piety.¹⁰⁷ James Webster consoled the spiritually broken-hearted that only ‘The soul’ ‘Drencht in Tears, lays hold on his Covenant’.¹⁰⁸ Ralph Erskine’s 1730 Communion sermon in front of the ‘Lord’s table’, published in 1742, conveyed that God’s ‘Love’ for his ‘people’ was ‘best’ understood within the covenant relationship. In fact, many

¹⁰² Webster, *Sacramental Sermons*, V.57, 60.

¹⁰³ Ibid., VI,72-73.

¹⁰⁴ For example, Henry Lindsay, *Christ’s Advocateship...* (Edinburgh: 1734), 28-29.

¹⁰⁵ Webster, *Sacramental Sermons*, v.57, Willison, *Five Sermons*, II.47-48. Erskine, *People’s Covenant*, 71ff.

¹⁰⁶ William McGeorge, *Five Sermons...Before and after the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper...* (Edinburgh: J. M’Ewan, 1729), III.168-169.

¹⁰⁷ *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 112-113. *Petitions from Societies...To the Reformed Presbytery*, N.A.S., CH3/269/42.

¹⁰⁸ James Webster, *Sacramental Sermons and Discourses at the Lord’s Table* (Edinburgh: John Reid Jr., 1705), sermon vi.72.

of his Communion sermons were purposed at highlighting how the Lord's Supper assuaged the spiritual pain that afflicted the 'Lord's people'.¹⁰⁹

Communion of the period also reached beyond the converted or 'worthy' communicants. The Seceder William Wilson's 1739 Communion at Orwell demonstrates the 'Action' sermon's poignancy. His sermon first focused on 'the Lamb's Followers' who were 'without fault in regard to their Justification, having their Sins washed away' and 'in respect of their Sanctification'. But after asking 'Are you justified by the Righteousness of the Lamb, and sanctified by his Spirit?', Wilson then assured the congregation: 'you have the Lamb's call to go to his Table; to take the Seal of his Covenant, the confirming Seal of his Love; to remember him, and what he hath done for you...He hath given himself for you; [now] go ye, then, and take a View of the worthy Lamb in the Sacrament...behold the Lamb of God.' Wilson's use of probing questions illustrates both how evangelicals attempted to stir an introspective piety within the converted, and how they evangelized the lost. While it is true that evangelicals expected communicants to 'sit at' the 'Tables' with purity of heart, it is equally important to note the emphasis they placed on drawing the unworthy into covenant. Therefore, it was expected that Communion seasons would console the spiritually weary, stir languid souls, and awaken the unconverted with the gravity of covenant 'promises'.¹¹⁰

Sacramental seasons mostly targeted the prepared, but rarely neglected opportunities at converting the unprepared. Sermons sought to awaken wary or hardened sinners to the 'gospel-covenant'. This was the main purpose behind encouraging self-examination. William McGeorge moved beyond the mere examination of communicants by a Kirk session. He instructed the congregation that 'both Ministers and Private Christians should

¹⁰⁹ Ralph Erskine, *The Power and Policy of Satan...In Three Sermons...* (Glasgow: David Duncan, 1742), 25. C.f., Ralph Erskine, *Best Bond, or Surest Engagement* ([Edinburgh?]: 1724), Erskine, *Faith's Plea*, Erskine, *People's Covenant*, Erskine, *The Promising God, a Performing God..Preached Oct.22nd 1733*.

¹¹⁰ William Wilson, *The Lamb's Retinue....* (Edinburgh: 1747), 27-29.

examine themselves chiefly' on hypocrisy of the 'heart'. Both were also 'to check those who are so bold as to meddle with the holy Things of God, without ever considering how they stand affected to the Lord, and to his Ways and Covenant. Shall any adventure to seal a Covenant with God, before they break their Covenant with Hell and Death?'¹¹¹ Ralph Erskine's 1738 'preparation-day' sermon was intent on seeing hearers converted to the way of covenant. 'Go to God and plead the covenant', he begged. 'Here is a covenant 'of' 'pardoning grace', 'quickenning grace', 'directing grace', 'healing grace', 'delivering grace', 'liberating grace', 'drawing grace' and ultimately 'extensive grace' that provided 'sin conquering grace' for those with 'soul-poverty'. 'This covenant contains all salvation', he concluded, and 'for all sorts of sinners'. Therefore, he ended the evangelistic message by imploring the unconverted 'to get yourself wrapt within the bond of this covenant, by believing it and pleading it'.¹¹² John Willison pleaded in one of his Communion sermons that

An uncovenanted Soul comes to God as his Judge: But O! it is comfortable to draw nigh to him as our reconciled God and Father in Jesus Christ, and with a holy Confidence...it will make the *Word* sweet; a covenanted Soul may read, and hear it as a *Love-Letter*...and may sweetly apply to Promises of it to himself, and say This is mine...God's gracious unchangeable Purpose to me in Christ: And O, but that would make the Word as lovely Song in our Ears! It will make the Lord's Supper sweet. O covenanted Souls, you can come to this holy Table, as to a precious Feast provided for you; you can come as God's Friends and invited guests.¹¹³

By itself, the Lord's Supper was not viewed as a 'converting' ordinance. It was viewed as a 'confirming' ordinance. However, the heavy emphasis given to the preaching of the word which accompanied the Sacrament's celebration made the Communion season as a whole, purposed at converting sinners. Communion sermons emphasized the atonement's continuing application to Christians and the possibility of salvation for those who had not yet 'closed with Christ' or 'taken hold' of 'His Covenant'. Ralph Erskine, described the atonement before his congregation's Communion: 'There is both a Well for washing, and a

¹¹¹ McGeorge, *Sermons*, III.168-169.

¹¹² Erskine, *Faith's Plea*, 463-466.

¹¹³ Willison, *Five Sermons*, II.43.

Well for drinking; and both are open, that the People may gather to them. The Well for washing is the Blood of the Covenant...The Well for drinking is not only that same Blood of Christ...But with all the Blessings...and all the Promises of the Covenant'.¹¹⁴ Aberdeen's John Bisset (1692-1756), a Church of Scotland minister, had his collection of Communion sermons posthumously published. In his sermon *Christ the Covenant of the People*, Bisset preached that 'Christ was made for the people a Covenant', to which he added, 'You are to seal a covenant this day' at the Sacrament. 'But first', he asserted, that congregants 'make sure' of 'an interest in Christ, and then you shall be established in him, and shall be sealed with the earnest of the Spirit in your hearts'. 'He will shed abroad his love in your hearts, will cause you to feel the constraining power and influence thereof on your soul, and make you remember his love more than wine'. Seated at the 'Table' and before offering the 'cup', Bisset reminded his congregation 'how sweet must the remembrance of Christ' be who 'has acted as your covenant...wherein he carried your condition, in every act wherein he acted your part...being broken for you' even 'when we were bankrupts, and had no credit for covenanting with God'. 'O how sweet' he yearned, 'that Christ is surety...for the people' which 'reacheth unto the whole covenant, in every condition and command in it, to every promise in it, to fulfil them all, to pay all your debt, and to perform all our duty, to work all our work, and to undergo all our punishment'.¹¹⁵ Thus, Communion sermons never neglected reaching those outside the covenant of grace. This had the effect of producing a regular, but powerful, resonance of revival.

Theologically, revival was easily connected with a Communion celebration as it encompassed conversionist preaching and the renewals of covenantal commitments.

Evangelicals followed the *Confession* in viewing the Lord's Supper, as a 'memorial' of Christ's death, a 'seal of his covenant', a sign of 'union' with his person, and 'Communion'

¹¹⁴ Ralph Erskine, *The Happy Congregation...* (Edinburgh: John Brigs, 1726), 43.

¹¹⁵ Bissett, *Christ the Covenant*, 33-35.

with him.¹¹⁶ This made the Sacrament generally focus on commitment or rededication of one's life to Christ. The sacraments, understood as sealing ordinances, were the intimate symbols of divine grace bestowed upon the covenanted people. However, more than serving as a mere 'badge' of outward profession, as some have noted,¹¹⁷ eighteenth-century evangelical Communion were thought to nourish the elect saint and further sanctify their covenantal connection with God. The sacraments were signs of grace already received and sacred communication between God and his elect through covenantal language. Covenanting, on the other hand, was a 'badge' of outward profession.

Covenanting and Communion

Sacramental seasons enabled ministers to demand deeper personal devotion from their parishioners.¹¹⁸ Personal covenanting commonly took place during these seasons.¹¹⁹ According to John Bisset, 'Communion and covenanting occasions go together'. Yet, he complained that 'Many deprive themselves of the comfort to be had in covenanting and sealing times, because they desire their comfort more from the frame of their hearts, than from Christ the covenant'. As he served the 'Tables', he reminded the congregation that 'Christ is the Principle party' 'of the covenant'. 'Do ye always give that place to Christ?' 'Remember Christ's Dying love' 'who is the Covenant for his people'.¹²⁰ Commemorating the death of Christ through Communion, swearing anew, or renewing former covenant duties was an individual's response of gratitude for salvation. However, the corporate dimension of covenant piety was seldom neglected. Willison called the Lord's Supper 'a *Covenanting Feast*' for the Lord's people. In the Sacrament, Willison noted that 'God's *exhibiting the Elements* is a *Seal* of the *Covenant* on his Part, that he will be our God, and that he gives us

¹¹⁶ James Fisher, *Doors of the Heart Summoned to Open to the King of Glory* (Glasgow: James Oliphant, 1755), 6ff. Erskine, *Rainbow of the Covenant*, 25. WCF, 29.1

¹¹⁷ James B. Torrance, 'The Contribution of Mcleod Campbell to Scottish Theology', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 26 (1973): 302.

¹¹⁸ Erskine, *People's Covenant*, 49, Bissett, *Christ the Covenant*, 31-40.

¹¹⁹ Spalding, *Synaxis*, Preface, 23ff. Reverend A.H., *Personal Covenanting*, Willison, *Sacramental Catechism*, Preface, viii. Morison, *Covenanting Catechism*, 1-15.

¹²⁰ Bissett, *Christ the Covenant*, 51-52, 31, 48.

his Son and all his Purchase, and will fulfill all his Promises to us in him. Our *taking of the Elements* is a *Seal on our Part*, of our accepting of Jesus Christ, and engaging to be his People, and that we will fulfil all the Duties required of us'.¹²¹ Prior to the Seceders' Covenant Renewal of 1743, Ralph Erskine reminded his congregation that they 'stand under' 'Covenant obligations' 'even though many be ashamed of, and refuse[d] to own' them. Scotland's Covenants, he pressed, should be upon the congregation's 'lamenting' hearts in their 'approaches to a Communion-table'.¹²² During a 1739 Secession Communion, William Wilson insisted that Scotland's abandonment of the 'Covenanted-cause' ought to bring his congregation to repentance.¹²³ The Seceders intensified this 'cause' throughout their churches after the Presbytery's Covenant renewal service.¹²⁴ While John Willison, and perhaps others remaining within the national Church, remained diffident toward formal covenanting ceremonies, the Seceders' and 'United Societies'' ministers did not. Communion seasons enabled an evangelical congregation the opportunity to reflect on the loss of a glorified covenanted past, but feel heartened over the prospects of revival and a covenanted future.

In emphasizing the Lord's Supper as the high time for the covenant people, ministers facilitated an introspective sacramental piety. This resembles what the historian Brooks Holifield has classified as 'characteristic of Reformed sacramental devotion' that stressed 'rigorous insistence on preparation, including meticulous and careful self-examination'.¹²⁵ Scottish evangelicals desired their communicants to be knowledgeable in the faith and willing to probe the recesses of their souls. This was why many argued that 'covenanting in its nature' had to precede 'communicating and sitting down at the table of the Lord'.

¹²¹ Willison, *Lord's Day*, 245.

¹²² Erskine, *People's Covenant*, 49-50.

¹²³ William Wilson, *The Evening-Time of the Church...A Sermon Preached at Orwell, June 11. 1739* (Edinburgh: W.Cheyne, 1743), 44.

¹²⁴ See, for example, Ralph Erskine, *Heaven Pos'd and Press'd...* (Glasgow: 1747), 19,52.

¹²⁵ E. Brooks Holifield, *Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570-1720* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1974), 19.

Covenanting ceremonies were always paired with days of 'fasting and humiliation'.¹²⁶ These were days specifically selected prior to Communion, and preparatory for it. The *Acts of the General Assembly* annually consecrated such days. Initially, the Post-Revolution Church utilized 'Fast Days' to recall the covenanted past. By the 1730s, this seems to have changed.¹²⁷ Seemingly, 'Fast Days' had grown perfunctory or politically suspect. After the 1707 Parliamentary Union, the 'Solemn-Fasts' became 'Thanksgiving' days.¹²⁸ Those who separated from the Church of Scotland hastily reinvented 'fast days'.

In its early days, the Reformed Presbytery established 'Fast Days' for the 'Societies' which sought admission to the Presbytery and participation in their Covenant renewal service.¹²⁹ For the Seceders, 'Covenanting-work' was 'always gone about on days of solemn-fasting and humiliation'. Adam Gib observed that it occurred 'commonly, on the fast-days before sacramental occasions'. 'All who' participated in it 'communicate[d] on the ensuing Sabbath; and, in some places, each receiving a token immediately upon their subscribing the Bond'.¹³⁰ One of William Wilson's sacramental sermons was prefaced with 'I hope' the Scripture verses 'are fruitable and proper for us to discourse unto you immediately after the solemn Profession of Subjection and Obedience unto the Lord Jesus, that many of you have made this Day in the Sacrament of our Lord's Supper'. Wilson was referring to communicants taking the 'Bond' and national Covenants.¹³¹ This demonstrates how important the covenanting ceremony was for preparing Seceder and Reformed Presbyterian communicants. Additionally, it shows how the Seceders, in the hope of rejuvenating 'covenanting-work', took advantage of the reverent aura that surrounded 'Fast' and

¹²⁶ Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, 53.

¹²⁷ Willison, *Church's Danger*, xx. Lindsay, *Present State*, 24,54-56.

¹²⁸ For example, *Acts of the General Assembly*, Act VI. January 26, 1699, Act V. 1700, which speaks directly of the Covenants and covenanting, Act IX. March 4, 1701. Act VII, 1708.

¹²⁹ *Papers Re Overtures for Renewing the Covenant*, N.A.S., CH3/269/43. This was modelled from the *Covenant Renewal...Douglas*, 1712, 5-16.

¹³⁰ Adam Gib, *Present Truth: A Display of the Secession-Testimony*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Fleming and Neill, 1774), 254.

¹³¹ Wilson, *Sermons*, '1 Corinthians.xvi.'1.

‘Humiliation’ days. In 1747, Moncrieff elaborated that such ‘days’ were necessary for self-examination prior to Communion. ‘And as Examination is necessary, so our renewing our Engagements to be the Lord’s ought likewise preceed the other, because, in sitting down at the Lord’s Table, we take the Seal of his Covenant; and if we be not in Covenant with him, our Joining in...his Supper is nothing more than sealing of a Blank.’ Moncrieff concluded that ‘there is at least a Necessity for Personal Covenanting preceeding Communicating, and now Providence has opened a Door for renewing our solemn-national Vows’.¹³² Similarly, the Reformed Presbytery demanded that assembled ‘Societies’ without a minister ‘provide evidences’ of worthy participants for covenanting and Communion.¹³³ As was historically and theologically fitting, the Seceders and Reformed Presbyterians held their covenanting services within the sacramental seasons. The covenanting ceremony thus framed the sacramental celebration.

The sacramental season, immersed in Covenanting heritage,¹³⁴ also served as a powerful affirmation of fraternity among evangelicals. Covenanting ensured not just that such fraternity existed; it also served as an additional ritual to the Sacrament. Covenanted unity was ‘sealed’ through the Lord’s Supper.¹³⁵ The intimacy of the sacramental season—gathering like-minded saints for spiritual nourishment—offered the perfect environment for establishing one’s covenanted commitments to God, renewing former engagements or corporately uniting Christians in doctrinal and ecclesiastical solidarity. The Lord’s Supper and the corporate covenant idea connected and were uniquely augmented to Presbyterian worship.

¹³² Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, 54.

¹³³ *Petitions*, Ch3/269/42.

¹³⁴ Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 27ff, Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity*, 59ff.

¹³⁵ Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 27, noted that the Lord’s Supper had become ‘a vehicle of Presbyterian protest and solidarity’ by the 1620s and 1630s.

Covenanting Ceremonies

After the re-establishment of Presbyterianism (1690), the first celebration of Communion within the context of covenanting occurred in the summer of 1712 in the Crawfordjohn parish. In this remote area near Douglas, Lanarkshire, at a place called 'Auchensaugh', a monument commemorates the gathering of the 'United Societies' for this event.¹³⁶ It had been twenty-two years since Communion was administered among the 'United Societies'. The presiding minister, John McMillan, reported that approximately 1,000 communicants, mostly adherents to the 'Societies', assembled for three days of worship through preaching, covenanting, and Communion.¹³⁷ An account of this experiential event was published shortly thereafter when concerns arose 'that some, who came with an evil Eye, to spy out our Liberty' for the purpose of 'criticising' rather than 'joining or profiting' had 'misrepresented' what took place. The 'United Societies' wished 'to obviate all such Misreports'.¹³⁸ Within the first two days of the services, a revival-like atmosphere had emerged, and Scotland's Covenants were renewed.

'Upon *Wednesday July 23*' the 'Societies'' peripatetic leader and 'Minister', John McMillan, 'began' 'with Prayer for special Assistance to attain due Preparation...and a suitable Frame, throughout the whole Solemnity'. McMillan delivered 'a prefatory Discourse' to the gathered remnant on 'the Nature of the Work...its Lawfulness, Expediency and Necessity'. He insisted that those assembled remember well the significance of that 'Day' with its 'Fasting and Supplication' and 'Preaching of the Word'. This was 'in Order' to prepare 'for the Solemnities' of 'both renewing the Covenants and Celebrating the Sacrament'. After these 'preparations' and the singing of Psalm 78, the service was handed over to 'Mr. John

¹³⁶ There is also a monument commemorating the 1968 disbandment of the Cameronians' Regiment.

¹³⁷ Robert Wodrow, *Analecta: Or Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences; Mostly Relating to Scotch Ministers and Christians*, 4 vols., vol. II (Edinburgh: Printed for the Maitland Club, 1843), 76-78. H.M.B. Reid, *Cameronian Apostle: John Macmillan of Balmaghie* (Paisley: A.Gardner, 1896). Watt, *Recalling the Scottish Covenants*, 70.

¹³⁸ *Covenant Renewal...Douglas, 1712*.

M'Neil' an Established Church licentiate.¹³⁹ M'Neil's sermon came from Jeremiah 50.4-5, a prophetic text. Its theme of spiritually reviving the people of God was striking. *"In those days and in that time, Saith the LORD, the Children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah shall come together, going and weeping: They shall seek the LORD their GOD. They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, saying, 'Come, let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual Covenant that shall not be forgotten'".* The sermon, paralleling Scotland and biblical Israel, expressed lament over nationwide spiritual 'declension' and an ingenuous call to repentance. The sermon's doctrinal section outlined the significance of 'entering into Covenant with GOD, whether Personal...or National' and how both might be 'renewed' according to 'the Scripture Precedents of the People of GOD' and Scotland's history dating from '1557' (the first 'band' designed against Roman Catholicism). After the sermon and more prayer, 'the Covenants' were read 'according to the Directory for Renewing the Solemn League and Covenant' as drafted by the 1648 General Assembly. After singing again from Psalm 78, the "Acknowledgement of Sins" was read. To this point, the assembled worshippers were little inspired, since the narrative noted that 'the Minister' issued a 'short' rebuke because he found the 'Congregation' 'Unconcerned' during the lengthy readings. As he 'Dismissed the Congregation', the narrative recalled how 'the Minister' reminded them of Scotland's 'Many Honourable Martyrs of all Ranks' hoping that they might 'Labour after a Heart-melting frame for the right-Performance of the Work'.

The following day's services belonged to John McMillan. He preached from Isaiah 44.5. *'One shall say, I am the LORD's and another shall call himself by the Name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and swear himself by the Name of Israel'.* In prophetic-like form, his sermon summoned the assembled to religious duty, primarily 'to Avow their Covenant-Relation to the Lord'. It also encouraged prospective

¹³⁹ Hutchison, *R.P.History*, 165-166.

covenanters to ‘glory in their Union with his Church and covenanted People’. Through the day’s sermons, according to McMillan, God was ‘Privileging his People with his gracious Presence, and with a shower of Gospel Grace’. Spiritual Revival was more than welcomed; it was expected. The event was envisioned as an authentic ‘*Soul-engaging*’ experience ‘wherein Souls’ were ‘engaged to fall in Love with the *Covenant*, and with *Christ the mediator of the Covenant*, and are taken in the Net of the Gospel’. It was ‘a time’ for ‘*many sweet and excellent resolutions*’ ‘to walk more accurately and circumspectly in the ways of new Obedience’. Yet, this was also to be ‘a *very uniting and healing Time*’ for the remnant covenanters. McMillan next re-read the “Acknowledgment of Sins” but also encouraged the congregation to make public confession of ‘Personal Miscarriages’ against the covenanted cause. The narrative indicated McMillan’s ‘Design’ was to follow the example of ‘*Josiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah*, and [Scottish] Church History’ in the same way ‘Reverend...*John Davidson*, who at the renewing of the Covenant, March 30-1596, not only exhorted’ other ministers present at the General Assembly ‘to a serious Confession of their Sins’ but also his own. Next came the reading of the “Engagement to Duties” which were both corporate and personal.

Finally, McMillan ‘prayed for the Gracious-Presence and Assistance of the...Spirit, to enable’ the congregation to ‘engage and perform’ the obligations of a covenanted people. McMillan charged ‘those who were to renew their Covenant’ to stand and ‘Hold up their Right Hands’. He then exhorted the outdoor congregation: ‘Now you who have renewed your Covenant with GOD must not imagine that you may sit down upon your Performance and rest yourselves as tho’ your work were perfected and finished’. ‘You have put a new Bond upon your Souls, to walk with GOD in all the ways of New Obedience.’ ‘A Holy life’, he defined, is what becomes of Covenanters. “Tis not Holiness in Name, shew and Appearance, but Holiness in Reality in Truth and Substance, that must be interwoven with all your Actions and Duties’. McMillan detailed specific means to accomplish such ‘Ends’.

‘Only Grace’ and ‘Acquaintance with Christ’ could give ‘strength to perform’ covenant ‘obligations’. After singing Psalm 103, the congregation was ‘prepared for *the Holy Communion*’ and encouraged to ‘Self-Examination’, ‘Fervant-Prayer and Supplication’. On the following ‘Sabbath’, the Sacrament was celebrated.¹⁴⁰ The Sacrament would not be celebrated in such magnitude for another thirty years among the assembled ‘United Societies’.¹⁴¹

In 1745 the newly established Reformed Presbytery renewed Scotland’s Covenants at Crawford-John, Lanarkshire, also celebrating the Sacrament. Nothing could have been more appropriate, as a means of unifying the scattered remnant groups, confirming their faith, and generating a new solidarity to the covenanted cause in whose hands rested the ‘true’ ‘testimony’ of the Reformed faith.¹⁴² The ‘Covenant Renewal’ in Britain’s Pennsylvania colony was precipitated in large part because the Reformed Presbyterians living there were ‘earnestly longing to partake...of the Lord’s Supper’. They ‘looked upon’ Covenant renewal ‘as a very useful and necessary Part of preparation’ for the Sacrament, particularly for those ‘that never had renewed them before, and were lying under that heinous Guilt of perjury’.¹⁴³ The Reformed Presbytery certainly envisioned that Scotland’s spiritual reviving was connected to its Covenants.¹⁴⁴ Yet it was Scotland’s combined Church and State reformation that appealed to Reformed Presbyterians.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ *Covenant Renewal...Douglas, 1712, 7-16, 29-33.*

¹⁴¹ Hutchison, *R.P. History*, 165-166, 190. Since McMillan, McNeil, and later Thomas Nairn served the ‘United Societies’ both before, during, and after the formation of the Reformed Presbytery, we can only guess that the Sacrament was celebrated in smaller gatherings. It is noted that the ministers served the ‘Societies’ that were waiting for the establishment of a Reformed Church and minister.

¹⁴² Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*.

¹⁴³ Alexander Craighead, ed., *Renewal of the Covenants...At Middle Octarara in Pensylvania* ([Philadelphia?]: 1748), vii. The transatlantic dimension of covenanting and the Sacramental seasons within the context of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America is briefly developed by Emily Moberg Robinson, ‘Scottish Covenanters and the Creation of an American Identity’, *Journal of Presbyterian History* 83 (2005).

¹⁴⁴ *Overtures, Ch3/269/43.*

¹⁴⁵ This will be developed in Chapter 6.

The Associate Presbytery's 'Minutes' offer insight into the extended preparation and sacredness of their covenanting ceremonies. Much like the 'Societies' 1712 renewal ceremony, the Seceders spread their event over several days. However, unlike the 'Societies', the Seceders' first renewal ceremony excluded lay participation. The Seceders were meticulous in preparing for what they felt was a 'Providential' event.¹⁴⁶ Adam Gib recounted the solemn occasion. He noted that the 'Presbytery having passed their *Act for renewing the Covenants*...in Stirling on the 23d-day of December 1743' 'continued' the 'meeting till the ensuing week'. It was not until the '28th-day of that month', that fifteen ministers 'observed' 'a day of public fasting'.¹⁴⁷ On the 'Fast-Day' James Fisher began 'the solemn-work' by 'praise and prayer', through 'Psalms'. Then Fisher was asked to 'read' the 'Acknowledgment of Sins prefixed to the Bond'. 'After singing', David Smyton offered another prayer followed by more psalmody. After another prayer, Adam Gib 'read the confession of sins of the ministry'. More 'singing' introduced Alexander Moncrieff, who also held the critical role of leading 'the ministers' in 'the engaging to duties' as expressed in the 'close of the Confession of the Sins [for] the ministry'.¹⁴⁸ Gib noted how the ministers stood 'before a numerous congregation' as they joined together in the public reading of the '*Confession of Sins of the Ministry*'.¹⁴⁹ William Hutton 'conclude[d] the forenoon's work with prayer and praise'. Not until the 'afternoon', did Thomas Mair preach about covenanting. The Presbytery appointed the following day to be observed with 'Fasting' and 'Solemn-Humiliation' so that 'the ministers of this Presbytery resolving thro Divine assistance' could 'proceed...with the solemn work of renewing our Covenants'.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ *Asso. Presbytery Records*, December 20-28, 1743. The account detailed every element of the covenanting week.

¹⁴⁷ Gib, *Present Truth*, Vol.1, 251-252.

¹⁴⁸ *Asso. Presbytery Records*, December 20-28, 1743.

¹⁴⁹ Gib, *Present Truth*, Vol.1, 251-252. The ministerial 'Acknowledgment of Sins' and 'Engagement to Duties' was subsequently published in the *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 1744.

¹⁵⁰ *Asso. Presbytery Records*, December 20-28, 1743.

Ebenezer Erskine preached the day of the ‘solemn’ service¹⁵¹ with Fisher leading in prayer and Psalmody’. Fisher, joined by Gib then assisted Ebenezer Erskine ‘in reading’ the National and Solemn League and Covenants, the ‘solemn acknowledgment of the Breaches of our Covenants’, and ‘the engagement to the duties’. Mair was ordered to ‘succeed’ these actions ‘with prayer’ and ‘acknowledge and confess the breaches of our Covenants and supplicate the Lord for his gracious presence’ in their Covenant renewal. Ebenezer Erskine then re-read ‘the Bond’ and upon ‘pronouncing’ the ‘Bond’ led ‘the rest of the ministers’ to stand ‘with their hands lifted up to the Lord’ as they entered ‘into covenant to seek the Lord God of our Fathers’. The *Minutes* indicated that ‘Immediately thereafter’, all the ministers ‘shall subscribe the Bond’ while Moncrieff concluded ‘with prayer and praise’. Apparently, there was a short recess as the Presbytery had ‘appointed’ Ralph Erskine to preach later ‘in the afternoon’. His role was to ‘exhort the ministers’ to ‘steadfastness’ in the ‘Oath and Covenant’.¹⁵² Finally, ‘the day of subscription was appointed’ publicly as ‘28th December 1743’ ‘at Stirling’.¹⁵³

The covenanting festivities were entirely orchestrated. Any freedom of spirit, or spontaneity, during this worshipful week was remarkably absent. However, this was a conference, blossoming with evangelical earnestness through its abundance of homilies, prayer and praise. It framed the covenanting ceremony as a larger-than-life event. The Seceders’ intent behind performing their ministerial ‘Covenant renewal’ service in reintroducing ‘covenanting-work’ to Scotland, was to connect with the historic ministerial revival of 1596. Led by John Davidson of Prestonpans, the General Assembly’s covenanting ceremony initiated a significant revival.¹⁵⁴ Undoubtedly, the Seceders’ intent through this public spectacle was to stimulate a revival of their own. This was to be a revival of old, highlighting the glories of the covenanted past and offering a ray of hope for a covenanted

¹⁵¹ Erskine, *Christ Considered*.

¹⁵² Erskine, *Covenanting Work*.

¹⁵³ *Asso. Presbytery Records*, December 20-28, 1743.

¹⁵⁴ See Chapter 1, and Williamson, *National Consciousness*, 74.

future. The Seceders' were not unaware of the spiritual awakenings then occurring mainly among Church of Scotland adherents at Cambuslang and Kilsyth.¹⁵⁵ The Seceders firmly believed that they were honouring God by establishing their cause through Scotland's historic method of revival—through covenanting. They had reasoned that God had previously honoured the doctrinally pure, and covenanted people of Scotland. Would not a Covenant God, again favour Scotland by showering them with blessings of revival?

The Seceders' covenanting event was intensely intimate. The sermons themselves, rich in covenant imagery and theology, inculcated the seriousness of the week's events to the ministers and Stirling's onlookers.¹⁵⁶ They also testified to the grandeur and extraordinary spiritual opportunity that the covenanted cause afforded all who would join. Ralph Erskine's sermon assumed that

To make us *his people*: or to avouch, confess, and acknowledge us as his *peculiar* people, as he hath promised us in Christ Jesus...and the promise, *You shall be my people*, necessarily imports the other, *I will be your God*; for our relation to him, as his people, presupposes his relation to us, as our God in Christ. God appropriating us to himself, and we appropriating God to ourselves; he publicly owns us to be his, and we publicly own him to be ours. His acknowledgment of us to be his peculiar people, imports, that as we are not our own, but his, so we are honoured with peculiar privileges; to be the people of his peculiar *choice*; *Being set apart for himself*; the people of his peculiar *delight*...and...the people of his peculiar pasture...In a word, to be his friends, his favourites, his jewels, his crown, his glory.

Much like the 'Societies' ceremony, the direct relationship between the Seceders' Church and biblical Israel was presupposed. But the Seceders' desires went beyond merely renewing Scotland's Covenants. They anxiously sought revival. As Erskine's sermon concluded, 'From what you have seen and heard this day, you may take *witnesses*...that God is yet the covenanted God of Scotland, though a covenanted people have departed from him, yet our covenanted God hath not quite departed from us'. Even 'now', 'before the year 1743 is to an end' God 'hath begun' again 'to set up a memorial' of past 'reformation-work' in order to 'repair all the breaches that have been made' against his covenanted Church.

¹⁵⁵ Associate Presbytery, *Act of the Associate Presbytery Anent a Publick Fast: At Dunfermline* (1742). The same was true of the 'United Societies' *Declaration of the True Presbyterians...Of Scotland; Concerning...Whitefield, And...Cambuslang*, (Glasgow: 1742).

¹⁵⁶ *Asso. Presbytery Records*, December 20-28, 1743, noted that Stirling's Associate Congregation be invited to watch the event. The notes also indicated that the 'public intimation' was made in Stirling.

Erskine then promised that God ‘will yet be *as the dew unto Israel; and make us revive as the corn, and grow as the lily, and cast forth our root as Lebanon.*’¹⁵⁷ His brother, Ebenezer, preached ‘immediately before the [Covenant] Renovation’: ‘We, the Ministers of the Associate Presbytery, are this Day met together, in order, through Grace, to renew these Solemn Covenants, in a suitableness unto the Circumstances...and to bring them forth again to the Light’.¹⁵⁸ Ebenezer then led the ministers, ‘with uplifted hands’ to swear the ‘*Engagement to Duties*’ ‘at the same time’ they *subscribed* their ‘*Bond*’.¹⁵⁹ That the ministers celebrated the Sacrament is not evident. It is certain that fifteen ministers signified their adherence to the new ‘Bond’ with appended signatures.¹⁶⁰ Several months later, on 14 March, a second Covenant renewal service at Falkirk inducted five more ministers into the covenanted cause. The Associate Presbytery’s ministers were all covenanted. The following day, the Presbytery passed another significant *Act*. The ‘Bond’ and Covenants were to ‘be publicly sworn and subscribed’ in every congregation with ministers ‘settled’ or ‘vacant’.¹⁶¹ By 1745, every congregation was covenanted.¹⁶² The Seceders’ covenanting services were designed to stimulate a revival.

Adam Gib detailed the ‘particulars’ of how Secession congregations conducted covenanting. Each congregation gave ‘Public intimation’ some ‘four to six weeks’ before conducting the ceremony. This enabled sessions time to prepare for the service and examine prospective participants. Beyond examining their laity, it enabled the several ministers needed to conduct such services time to assemble and prepare. It was noted that the host minister ‘commonly’ was ‘assisted’ ‘by two or more of his brethren’. On the day of the ceremony, ‘praise and prayer’ along with ‘a sermon’ by the host minister opened the services of worship. The host minister preached on covenanting’s seriousness and biblical rationale.

¹⁵⁷ Erskine, *Covenanting Work*, 223, 227-228.

¹⁵⁸ Erskine, *Christ Considered*, iii.

¹⁵⁹ Gib, *Present Truth*, Vol. 1, 251-252.

¹⁶⁰ *Asso. Presbytery Records*, December 20-28, 1743.

¹⁶¹ Gib, *Present Truth*, Vol. 1, 253.

¹⁶² *Asso. Presbytery Records*, March 5-7, 1745.

‘After prayer’, the minister read aloud ‘the names of those who are to join’.¹⁶³ This included all those who desired church membership, since the ‘Bond and Covenants’ became ‘Terms of Christian Communion’.¹⁶⁴ Subscribers of the ‘Bond’ and Covenants were then ‘all’ ‘properly seated together’, perhaps at the front of the sanctuary. The host minister ‘first read’ the National Covenant ‘as it was entered into in the years 1580 and 1581, without the *Bond*’ from 1638 as ‘the example’ from the Scottish ‘Reformers’. The minister followed this with the Solemn League and Covenant. Then the ‘assisting Ministers’ read the lengthy ‘*Acknowledgment of Sins*’ and the ‘*Engagement to Duties*’, dividing it into sections among themselves and prefacing their sections with ‘a short prayer’. The formal reading of these lengthy documents was ceremonial, being noted as ‘preparatory to engaging in’ covenanting. After the host minister offered prayers of ‘Confession and Supplication’, he led the congregation in ‘praise’. Finally, the ‘Bond’ was ‘administered’ by the host minister who asked the prospective subscribers to stand. They all signified their covenanted allegiance by ‘holding-up their right-hands’. Gib noted that ‘in some places, after administering the Bond—all present who had formerly joined in it, and are to be admitted to the Lord’s Table on the following Sabbath, do (on being called to do so) testify their adherence by lifting up their right hands’.¹⁶⁵ The ‘Bond’ concluded with these words:

And in regard we are taught by the word of God, and bound by our Covenants...to live together in the fear of God, and in love one to another, and to encourage one another in the work and cause of the Lord; and that, denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world: therefore, in a dependence on the Lord’s grace and strength, we in the same manner do *promise* and *swear*, that we shall, in our several places and callings, encourage and strengthen one another’s hands in pursuing the end and design of our solemn Oath and Covenant; and that we shall endeavour a life and conversation becoming the gospel of Christ. And that, in our personal callings, and particular families, we shall study to be good examples to one another of godliness and righteousness; and of every duty that we owe to God and man: And that we shall not give up ourselves to a detestable indifferency and neutrality in the cause of God; but denying ourselves and our own things, we shall, above all things, seek the honour of God and the good of His cause and people: and that through grace forsaking the counsels of flesh and blood, and not leaning upon carnal confidences; we shall endeavour to depend upon the Lord, to walk by the rule of His word, and to hearken to his voice by His servants. In all which, professing our own weakness, we earnestly pray to God, who is the Father of mercies,

¹⁶³ Gib, *Present Truth*, Vol.1, 254-255.

¹⁶⁴ *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 118-119.

¹⁶⁵ Gib, *Present Truth*, Vol.1, 254-255.

through His Son Jesus Christ, to be merciful unto us; and enable us by the power of His Holy Spirit, that we may do our duty, unto the praise of His grace in the Churches.—Amen.¹⁶⁶

Subscription concluded with ‘an exhortation to the covenanters’ followed by more prayer and psalmody. As the congregation sang, subscribers walked forward to sign a ‘Book of Covenants’ which included the signatures of past subscribers. Formal attestation by the ministers present as well as concurrence of the session clerk validated the numerous signatures in these sacred ‘Books of the Covenant’.¹⁶⁷ Subscribers to the ‘Bond’, if they could write, signed their names in the congregational copy of the ‘Bond and Covenants’. Those who could not write, commissioned session clerks to record their names. Both men and women¹⁶⁸ were admitted to swear the ‘Bond’ and Covenants. These books represented covenanted solidarity and stood as a reminder of the Lord’s presence in reviving a congregation’s call to covenantal piety.¹⁶⁹ In the ‘Bond’ Scotland’s Covenants are merely mentioned as binding subscribers to live together in the fear of God and their love toward one another. This is significant in understanding the personal and sentimental attachment that such a service would have created. Another sermon concluded the service, reminding hearers of ‘binding’ ‘covenant duties’. These sermons detailed covenantal piety.¹⁷⁰ On the ‘Sabbath’ after the covenanting ritual, Communion was celebrated.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 117-118.

¹⁶⁷ *Book of the Covenants, Abernethy Associate Church*, N.A.S., CH3/687/13.

¹⁶⁸ The inclusion of women was an innovation of the seventeenth-century’s covenanting ceremonies, as only male signatories participated. Women were excluded in the Reformed Presbytery’s covenanting ceremonies.

¹⁶⁹ *Abernethy, Ch3/687/13. Dumfries ‘Bond’ 10 Nov 1774*, N.A.S., CH3/641/2, *Greenock Bond*, N.A.S., CH3/812/34, *Kilmaurs, Associate [Antiburgher] Congregation 1740-1760*, N.A.S., CH3/193/1, *Milanthort Congregation: ‘Act for Renewing the Covenants’, 1747-1789*, N.A.S., CH3/252/13. *Perth [North] Associate Session [Antiburgher] 1739-1774*, N.A.S., CH3/507, *Edinburgh, Nicolson Street Antiburgher, 1764-1969*, N.A.S., CH3/617, *Kirkcaldy, Pathhead Antiburgher Church, Associate Session (Linktoun), 1743-1880*, N.A.S., CH3/1144, *Records of Pollokshaws East Free Church, 1764-1930*, N.A.S., CH3/1636.

¹⁷⁰ Gib, *Present Truth*, Vol.1, 256. For example, such sermons were compiled in the polemical treatises of Moncrieff, *Covenanting*. Morison, *Present Duty*, Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, Morison, *Acknowledgment of Sin*, Young, *Evangelical Covenanting*.

¹⁷¹ *Asso.Presbytery Records*, Feb 11-14, 1744.

The covenanting ceremony was presented as having eternal significance.¹⁷² In describing the seriousness of the ceremony in a 1778 sermon, John Young insisted that ‘every Christian’ who made ‘a proper use of the sacrifice of Christ, in taking hold of God’s Covenant, appeals to God himself, as to his sincerity in the matter’. ‘The more publicly and solemnly’ one’s ‘acceptance of the Covenant’ was ‘declared’, he asserted, ‘the more honour’ placed ‘upon the Covenant; upon him who contrived it, and...who is the Head of it’. The ‘more fully and honourably’ one confessed Christ, ‘the more honourably’ would Christ ‘acknowledge’ his people. In taking the ‘Covenant’, Young asserted, ‘we hesitate not to say, the more fully and openly will [Christ] befriend you and protect you, in a day of public calamity’.¹⁷³

The ceremony was never to be taken lightly or only ‘with the outward solemnity of your hands lifted up’ to God. Covenant subscription needed to be done ‘with the inward solemnity of your hearts lifted up’ to God. Ralph Erskine’s comment on covenanting’s events may not have been truer: ‘you never saw such a day, and perhaps never will! Let not this day be lost’.¹⁷⁴ Unfortunately, the effects of these covenanting services on the Secession’s laity are little known.¹⁷⁵ The nineteenth-century historian David Scott noted that ‘The service was very impressive, many of the audience were occasionally in tears, and the result was usually a deeper-toned religious life, a revival of the work of grace in the congregation, and the strengthening of that high-toned religious principle...’¹⁷⁶ The Seceders’ covenanting apologists indicated this as well.¹⁷⁷ What seems more certain, is that hundreds, if not thousands, of laypersons participated in this event and subscribed the ‘Bond and Covenant’ ‘with their own hands’.¹⁷⁸ By the 1780s, Gib confirmed that covenanting ‘has been several times gone about, in the generality of settled congregations’ and ‘in some’ of

¹⁷² Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, 30-35.

¹⁷³ Young, *Evangelical Covenanting*, 44,47-48.

¹⁷⁴ Erskine, *Covenanting Work*, 228.

¹⁷⁵ A study on the Secession Church laity would be welcomed.

¹⁷⁶ Scott, *Original Secession Church*, 12.

¹⁷⁷ For example, Morison, *Acknowledgment of Sin*, 29.

¹⁷⁸ *Abernethy*, Ch3/687/13.

the Antiburgher churches, 'six or seven times'. Yet the swearing of the 'Bond' and covenants was 'not repeatedly' done 'by the same persons, but by new persons who offered themselves upon repeated occasions'.¹⁷⁹ It seems fair to assume that within the Secession churches one might participate in numerous covenanting services throughout their life, but stand before the church only once in the subscription ceremony. Often attracting hundreds of participants in the early and middle eighteenth century, these solemn occasions became high days of devotion and revival.¹⁸⁰ They also received the ire of broader evangelical Presbyterians.¹⁸¹

'Terms of Communion'

Open admission to Communion was an ongoing fear among evangelicals. 'Terms of Communion' were used to enforce obedience to key tenets of Presbyterianism. It also enabled the Table to be 'Fenced'. This meant that each communicant had to be prepared spiritually to receive Communion. Hence, a credible profession of faith was sought in order to exclude the scandalous and ignorant. 'The power of Admission and Seclusion belongeth properly to the Eldership' which could judge properly the character of those seeking fellowship in the Communion season.¹⁸² Since Communion was purposed at confirming the benefits of the covenant of grace and not a converting ordinance, none had a right to it except covenanted church members. Presbyterians, following their confessional tradition,¹⁸³ enforced discipline within their congregations prior to celebrating Communion.¹⁸⁴ 'Fencing

¹⁷⁹ Gib, *Present Truth*, Vol. 1, 253.

¹⁸⁰ *Abernethy*, CH3/687/13, *Dumfries 'Bond'*, CH3/641/2, *Nicolson Street Session*, CH3/617, *Greenock Bond*, CH3/812/34, *Kirkaldy Session*, CH3/1144, *Milanthort*, CH3/252/13, *Perth Session*, CH3/507, *Bond of the Covenant...Kurriemuir*, New College MS5612.

¹⁸¹ This is a subject of Chapter 6.

¹⁸² Hog, *Mixture*, 56.

¹⁸³ The Westminster Assembly voted overwhelmingly to forbid unworthy communicants participation in the Lord's table. A.F. and John Struthers Mitchell, ed., *Minutes Of ...The Westminster Assembly of Divines...* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1874), 257.

¹⁸⁴ Rosiland and Leneman Mitchison, Leah, *Sexuality and Social Control: Scotland 1660-1780* (Basil: Blackwell, 1989), 16ff.

the tables' remained a vital feature of Secession and Reformed Presbyterian Communion, whereby a solemn warning was proclaimed to 'unworthy' hearers and those uncovenanted.¹⁸⁵

Prior to serving the Sacrament, Ralph Erskine told his congregation that the 'Supper, which we now are to celebrate, is an open Seal of an Hidden life, a visible Seal of an invisible Life; and these that are to be admitted with God's allowance, are only these that have Life hid with Christ in God...' ¹⁸⁶ However, Erskine would not have admitted a person based on a mere

profession of faith. The Seceders made subscription to covenanting, along with their respective doctrinal 'Principles' the 'terms of ministerial and Christian Communion'. ¹⁸⁷

Admission to church membership and the sacraments among both covenanting denominations were determined by such conditions. This meant that membership and partaking of the sacraments entailed publicly swearing the sacred oaths. ¹⁸⁸ Moreover, the

Lord's Supper could be withheld from those who failed to possess the historic and theological eagerness for the covenanted cause. The Seceders' *Act For Renewing the Covenants* used the 'Bond' as the 'proper admission of people to the sealing ordinances'.

The *Act* also asserted 'that none shall be admitted to swear or subscribe the Covenants, but such as have a competent measure of knowledge' and who 'were free of scandal' possess 'a conversation becoming the gospel' and 'a credible profession of willingly offering themselves unto the Lord in this work'. ¹⁸⁹ How compulsory 'swearing' the 'Bond' really

was is difficult to judge. According to Gib, such an obligation was never strictly enforced.

Yet, some of Gib's contemporaries believed otherwise. ¹⁹⁰ An interesting footnote by Gib seemingly clarifies the issue. 'So far as' he knew, 'there had been no instance (now after the course of about thirty years) of any people being kept back from sealing ordinances—for not

¹⁸⁵ *Testimony against the Defections of the Seceders from Their Original Plan...By a Christian Society in Abernethy*, (Edinburgh: W.Gray, 1767), 17.

¹⁸⁶ Ralph Erskine, *Best Security for the Best Life...* (Edinburgh: W.Grey, 1746).

¹⁸⁷ M'Kerrow, *History*, 188-196, 530-533.

¹⁸⁸ This was noted by Hutchison, *R.P.History*, 213.

¹⁸⁹ *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 119.

¹⁹⁰ Hall, *Worship*, 120, Hutchison, *Religious System...Of Relief*, 26ff.

joining in covenanting-work'. 'But', he concluded, our 'people' 'have always been waited for, till willingly offering themselves; upon occasions of that solemn work, in their several congregations.'¹⁹¹

The 'Revolution Settlement' only further frustrated the 'Cameronians' and 'Societies' who remained indignant over the lack of subscription to Scotland's Covenants as a condition celebrating Communion. The same could be said for the Reformed Presbyterian Church, though little evidence remains. According to Hutchison, the 'United Societies' made public affirmation of the 1712 'Covenant renovation' at Auchensaugh a requirement for sacramental admission. In the 1761 publication of the *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, the Reformed Presbytery's covenanted principles made Scotland's Covenants a 'term of Communion' for its people. This remained their 'term of Communion' until 1822.¹⁹² The controversial principle of the Relief Church, viciously opposed by the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians, was 'open' 'Evangelical' Communion where no such 'terms' were conditional.¹⁹³

'Terms of Communion' became the standards for covenantal piety. They insured that communicants were fully covenanted, or in harmony with covenanting principles. James Morison (Antiburgher) asserted in 1767 that 'A joining together in the Sacrament' was 'a declaration of unity of judgement about the truths of God...but Latitudinarianism is a joining together upon condition, that every one shall be at full liberty to maintain what principles he pleases'.¹⁹⁴ However, such 'terms' of Communion were divisive. Nothing prohibited ecumenicity within the eighteenth-century Scottish Church more than this. Hugh Watt rightly asserted that making covenanting a 'term of Christian Communion' sparked 'bitter local controversies, especially where a minister, fencing the tables and emphasizing the old

¹⁹¹ Gib, *Present Truth*, Vol.1, 255-256,253.

¹⁹² Hutchison, *R.P.History*, 90,95,212ff.

¹⁹³ Struthers, *Relief Church*, 316ff.

¹⁹⁴ Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 51,131.

Covenants rather than the new Bond, seemed to bar the way to scrupulous souls, who felt that approval of the old Covenants carried with it approval of all the seventeenth-century's unspiritual ways of enforcement'.¹⁹⁵ Debates soon arose over the 'frequency' of covenant renewal between Burgher and Antiburgher theologians in the century's second half. These debates served to perpetuate sharp discussions over the relevancy of 'terms of Communion'. Similarly, Church of Scotland and Relief Church evangelicals argued against the inconsistencies of the covenanting 'terms'. Gradually, admission to Communion for all who professed faith in Christ became common in eighteenth-century Scotland. In breaking away from the traditions surrounding Scotland's covenant idea, and proclaiming freer 'Terms of Communion', the Relief Church breathed a new, evangelical spirit of catholicity into the religious landscape. By the century's end, the 'New Light' controversy would change such rigid 'terms of Communion', forever sealing the fate of Scotland's covenanting and sacramental legacy.¹⁹⁶

Donald Fraser's editorial comments on Ralph Erskine's diary offer further insight into the context of eighteenth-century covenanting. Typical of late-nineteenth-century historians' sanitization of Covenanting history, Fraser gave little detail on the Seceders' 1743 covenanting ceremony. Instead, he placed it broadly within the context of the evangelical sensibilities. He correctly noted that in the mid eighteenth century, covenanting 'zeal' was viewed as 'a scriptural means of reviving the power of godliness' by 'the generality of the pious clergymen who chose to retain their connexion with the national Church'.¹⁹⁷ He had Church of Scotland minister John 'Willison' 'and his associates' in mind who had drafted A *Fair and Impartial Testimony* (1744). Within this significant work, Willison referred to Scotland's ecclesiastical and national 'defection by covenant-breaking'. The document was a call, albeit less forthright in tone than the Secession, 'Societies', or Reformed Presbyterian

¹⁹⁵ Watt, *Recalling the Scottish Covenants*, 86-87.

¹⁹⁶ This will be the subject of chapter 6.

¹⁹⁷ Donald Fraser, *Life and Diary of the Reverend Ralph Erskine* (Edinburgh: William Oliphant & Son, 1834), 269-270.

literature, for Scotland to return to its covenanted roots. Like the other covenanting groups, Willison acknowledged that Scotland's revival would come through advancing covenantal piety. He insisted that the remedy was only to return to the old ways, by 'looking earnestly' to the 'Spirit's influence and special blessing upon all those means and endeavours, until at length the whole land arrive at the happy frame and disposition of our forefathers, when they, with one consent, renewed Covenant with God, and dedicated themselves and their posterity unto the Lord'. This was an appeal to Scotland's covenanted heritage. The document was not self-defined as a 'Bond' or 'Covenant renewal'. Its subscribers, eight ministers and two elders, designated it as an 'Adherence'. Whether or not a covenanting ceremony accompanied Willison's *Testimony* is unverifiable. Yet, it should be noted that Fraser's (and later Hugh Watt's) assertions that the *Testimony* was equivalent to the Secession's 'Bond' and 'Covenant renewal' were overstated.

In opposition to the Seceders 'Bond', Willison's *Testimony* noted that the document was not to be understood as 'a Badge of Party or Term of Communion' but as a 'Banner of Truth', a 'Prompter to Reformation' and 'a Means of healing Breaches'.¹⁹⁸ While the document exalted Scotland's Covenants and decried national and ecclesiastical apostasy, its similarity to the Secession's 'Bond' and 'renewal' rests only in its actual 'testimony' of Scotland's need for revival. It does not connect its 'adherents' by a religious rite or oath. Ostensibly, Willison's leadership among a small contingency of evangelicals who remained in the Church of Scotland and still valued Scotland's Covenants felt the successes of the Seceders' rapid growth enough to publish such a statement. It is significant that they also believed Scotland's revival was connected with its Covenants. Watt seemingly was correct in noting 'the effectiveness of this document' was 'in preventing' the Church of Scotland's 'wholesale landslide into the Secession'.¹⁹⁹ Willison's *Testimony*, however, was re-printed in 1765. Published in Glasgow, it lists some 400 subscribers from twenty-six regions or towns across

¹⁹⁸ Willison, *Fair and Impartial*, 122-125.

¹⁹⁹ Watt, *Recalling the Scottish Covenants*, 89-90.

central and western Scotland. Only one of the subscribers listed was a parish minister the others were various tradesmen or merchants.²⁰⁰ What is most telling is that many of the regional and town names (even some of the individuals' names) correspond with 'United Societies'' meeting places listed in manuscripts of the Reformed Presbytery.²⁰¹ Moreover, the Reformed Presbytery soon established churches in many of these areas after the document's publication. The sheer desire to fulfil the nation's Covenants' obligations and a recognizable need for national and ecclesiastical revival, doubtlessly prompted the (re)circulation of the *Testimony*. The spirit of the covenant idea was strong among Scotland's evangelicals as a whole.

The growth of the Seceders, despite internecine disputes, was significant.²⁰² The Reformed Presbytery also added to its number after their Covenant renewal(s).²⁰³ Such growth should be primarily attributed to the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians' adherence to the older federal theology and perceptions among Scotland's laity that both groups trustworthily identified with the Covenanting period's revivalist legacy. Added to this, was evangelical Presbyterianism's historic aversion to patronage—the legal rights to present nominee ministers to vacant parishes—held almost exclusively by individuals, mostly landed class, or those vested in the monarchy and administered by governments who deferred to local nobility. 'Dissenting' denominations were entirely dependent on voluntary contributions and pew rents, unlike the Church of Scotland which drew 'teinds', a property tax on landowners and tenants. One contemporary, John MacLaurin, Lord Dreghorn (1734-1796), wrote in 1766 that 'commonsense' showed 'the right of patronage is incompatible with the Presbyterian religion'. An advocate of the Church of Scotland, he argued that the 'absurdity'

²⁰⁰ John Willison, *Fair and Impartial Testimony...* (Glasgow: John Finlay Wright, 1765; reprint, 1765).

²⁰¹ *Overtures*, CH3/269/43, *Petitions*, CH3/269/42.

²⁰² Callum Brown, *The People in the Pews: Religion and Society in Scotland since 1780*, ed. R.H. Campbell, *Studies in Scottish Economic & Social History*, vol. 3 (Dundee: Stevenson Ltd, 1993), 10-11.

²⁰³ Hutchison, *R.P. History*, 439.

of patronage being enforced was a reason behind the estimated '120,000 of the people of this country' who had already 'left the established church'.²⁰⁴ Another contemporary decried the financial irresponsibility of Scotland's patronage scheme. He noted in 1773 that the Seceders' Burgher Synod had 'fifty-nine congregations' 'served by forty-three ministers' and the Antiburgher Synod consisted of more than 'ninety-seven congregations' with smaller vacant charges not brought into [those] calculations' and 'seventy-seven ministers, and thirteen probationers besides which they had seven young men on trials in harvest last'. There were also 'two Presbyterys[sic] in Ireland, eight ministers and congregations belonging to each Presbytery, four congregations in England, and eight Missionaries in America, at Pensylvania[sic] and New York, all of whome are connected with [the Antiburgher] Synod.' It was also noted that the 'Old Presbyterian Dissenters', of the Reformed Presbytery, 'have seven settled congregations, and two vacancies...which are served by seven ministers'.²⁰⁵ The growth of the Secession Synods after the 1750s²⁰⁶ should take into account the imposition of patronage by the Church of Scotland's General Assembly which raised parishioners' ire. Such an influx of membership, many of whom perhaps joined the Secession because of patronage rather than their attraction to covenanting, also helps to explain the shift away from sentiments which valued a corporate Covenant ideal. Nevertheless, the significant numbers of the 'United Societies'' adherents, Seceder and Reformed Presbyterians who would have participated in covenanting ceremonies from 1712 to at least 1766 because it was a term of Communion or because they truly desired to uphold the Covenant idea, are remarkable.

²⁰⁴ MacLaurin, *Right of Patronage*, 26. He also noted that the Relief Presbytery possessed only 'fourteen settled congregations' and 'five vacancies' 'which were served by fourteen ministers'.

²⁰⁵ *Considerations on Patronages. Addressed to the Gentlemen of Scotland. Likewise a State of the Secession in Scotland In...1773*, (Glasgow: 1774), 16-18.

²⁰⁶ The deposition of Thomas Gillespie marked the height of the General Assembly's imposition of patronage. See Roxburgh, *Gillespie*, 110.

Conclusion

Scotland's ecclesiology and Covenants were not separate from the sacraments. The correlation of these is vital in interpreting the changing context of eighteenth-century Presbyterianism and federal theology. Scotland's evangelicals possessed a unique interest in the sacraments because of the covenantal dimensions within Scottish Reformed theology.²⁰⁷ Evangelical ministers cultivated a rich sacramental spirituality that deliberately inculcated covenantal motifs and made practical the imagery of a covenanted people closely engaged with their God. Throughout the century, evangelicals, and particularly the Secession clergy, not only preached, but published hundreds of sermons, meditations, and catechisms focusing on the sacramental season. Federal theology saturated every aspect of these sermons.

Historically and theologically, Scotland's Communion seasons, covenanting ceremonies and revivals corresponded. With the exception of the Seceders' 1743 (ministerial) covenanting ceremony, covenanting always occurred in the context of the sacraments. Examining church members before Communion seasons aided in preserving the covenanting groups' doctrinal purity, and disseminated the ideals of an historic, covenanted solidarity. Communion, when combined with covenanting, were opportunities to bring souls into covenant. Opening the door to the covenanted way through baptism and nourishing the covenanted faithful through preaching gave legitimacy to returning Scotland's soul to the covenanted way. Covenant theology and its continued integration into the period's popular evangelical piety fused together ideas of powerful worship experiences, holiness, and yearnings for revival that included personal and corporate dimensions. Rich in experiential spirituality and covenantal imagery, the sacraments formed the core of Secession and Reformed Presbyterian piety. Covenanting with Communion combined to form seasons of repentance and renewal. These were seasons which challenged languid affections, revived the lost, and bolstered a constantly fragile piety built on Covenant commitments. This created a sacramentalism,

²⁰⁷ Old, *Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 464.

unique to Scotland, that combined the covenant idea with the mythic legacy of ecclesiastical and national revival. In Secession and Reformed Presbyterian reminiscences, the relationship between Scotland's historic covenanting days and sacramental seasons represented the most sacred of worship experiences.

In reality, covenanting was a defensive mechanism that unified evangelicals in the cause of the Protestant and Reformed religion and in re-establishing what many perceived to be defective within Presbyterianism. It divided the Scottish Church on the whole, evangelicals included. Corporate covenanting preceded the Sacrament primarily as a public testimony advancing or preserving seventeenth-century Presbyterian orthodoxy. This made the covenanting ceremonials tedious, and perhaps wearisome among eighteenth-century laity. Ministers underscored that covenantal holiness entailed corporate commitments to orthodoxy in doctrine, worship, and discipline of the 'true' Church of Scotland. Hence, covenanting ceremonies involved the reading of Scotland's Covenants, along with the 'Bond', 'Acknowledgment of Sins' and 'Engagement to Duties'.²⁰⁸ The spiritual preparation involved in covenanting demarcated Scotland's pious from its profane through its almost endless self-abasing 'Confessions' and 'Acknowledgments'.²⁰⁹ Ministers were preoccupied with the high spirituality of self-examination, soul-cleansing, and confession of sin. Theirs was a deep concern that congregants were 'in covenant' with God, 'taking hold' of 'covenant promises' and endeavoring to 'walk' in the manner of covenantal holiness.²¹⁰

Being bound by covenant promoted a sense of Christian responsibility toward the covenanted cause of doctrinal and ecclesiastical purity. Covenanting had the effect of forging a barrier between 'covenanted' evangelicals and the ever-increasing worldliness in the national Church and society. By combining Communion with Covenant renewal, it was

²⁰⁸ Morison, *Acknowledgment of Sin*. The Reformed Presbytery's model adhered to *The Covenant Renewal...Douglas, 1712*.

²⁰⁹ Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony. Act for Renewing the Covenants*.

²¹⁰ Erskine, *Covenanting Work*, 220ff.

thought that great potential existed to rekindle Scotland's spiritual legacy. Thus, sacramental seasons were accompanied by covenanting solemnities primarily focused on spiritually rejuvenating a covenanted people either through conversion or encouragement. If revival was to be had, it would come through covenant renewal and during the Communion season. While covenanting services were intended to stimulate revival at least originally, the Seceders' insistence on making covenanting a 'Term of Communion' so formalized the ceremonials that the prospects for revival became nothing more than a perfunctory custom.

The sacraments drew together the corporate and individual dimensions of the covenant idea. Federal theology's corporate dimensions drew heavily on complex and theoretical categories. Perhaps such theological intricacy needlessly distracted from theological emphases that garnered broader consensus among other Presbyterian evangelicals or the Reformed tradition. Baptism might still have signified proper entrance into the outwardly administrated covenant of grace and a visibly covenanted Church, but by century's end only the Antiburghers and Reformed Presbyterians discussed the corporate implications of such theological claims. These authoritative emphases, traditionally placed on the covenanting ceremony's outward profession, began to be questioned and soon declined. Covenanting, as it was applied through Communion seasons did not hamper the growth of dissenting Presbyterianism. As we shall see in the final chapter, by the 1780-90s it would become a hindrance to denominational peace.

CHAPTER SIX

RENEWAL CONTROVERSIES:
COVENANT EXPECTATIONS AND THE DEMISE OF AN IDEAL

Gordon Donaldson observed in ‘Reviewing Scottish history’ since ‘the Reformation’, that ‘it is a little difficult to avoid the conclusion that the principle mark of the “church of Scotland” is establishment’.¹ Indeed, the ideal of a national church ‘by law established’—a covenanted Church—with uniformity of doctrine, worship, discipline and government, shaped the ecclesiastical ambitions of Secession and Reformed Presbyterians. Like the ‘United Societies’ and Reformed Presbyterians, the Secession Churches never rejected the establishment ideal; they longed for its revival. The proper means for reviving the Scottish Church, they urged, was through the corporate applications of federal theology. Practically speaking, this entailed the re-creation(s) of such an ideal from without rather than a reformation from within the national Church. If Scotland was to experience revival, it was assumed that it would come by way of Covenant renewal, an action that the national Church would not pursue.

The national church ideal also included strong views about the function of the State in a truly covenanted society. God ruled over Church and State. The magistracy, under the moral influence of the national Church, was appointed by God to uphold the moral law in society.² While the seventeenth-century political instability had much abated after the Revolution Settlement, varying aspirations for Church and State relations lingered among Covenant-minded evangelicals. For the Seceders and Reformed Presbyterians, Scotland remained covenanted with God. The establishment of these denominations in 1733 and 1745 served to

¹ Gordon Donaldson, *Scotland: Church and Nation through Sixteen Centuries* (London: SCM, 1960), 112.

² *WCF*, 23, 30.

re-intensify latent ideas of covenanting Presbyterian hegemony. Church and State relations received significant attention within both of their doctrinal *Testimonies*.³ While a significant part of the Secession Synods' beliefs, Church and State relations should not be understood as the sole catalyst behind their covenanting. But the Reformed Presbytery's view of Church and State relations remained akin to those of the later seventeenth-century Covenanters. Moreover, the magistracy's role within a covenanted society was not easily agreed upon. The second half of the eighteenth century was a critical period for Secession and Reformed Presbyterians as they attempted to reconcile tensions between Church and State relations within their theology and under the shadow of Scotland's Covenanting heritage. It also added confusion by stirring intemperate debates over historically unresolved political issues and classic federal theology. This frenzied political history and the ever-present lack of consensus that surrounded the corporate applications of federal theology, along with Scotland's social, political and ecclesiastical developments in an 'Age of Improvement', inevitably put to rest evangelical Presbyterians' aspirations of Church and nation being revived through Covenant.

Two Kingdoms Theology

Like their Covenanting predecessors, Secession and Reformed Presbyterians distinguished a twofold kingdom theory that influenced their views of Church and State.⁴ The two kingdoms theory was an innovative and radical affront to sixteenth and seventeenth-century forms of absolute monarchy. Prior to the Reformation, Scotland's conception of civil and ecclesiastical was nearly identical. 'As elsewhere in western Europe', noted David Mullan, 'the Scottish episcopate was deeply embedded in not only the ecclesiastical order, but also in

³ Assoc. Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 97-103, Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*.

⁴ Associate Presbytery, *Answers by the Associate Presbytery, to Reasons of Dissent... Together with a Declaration and Defence of the Associate Presbytery's Principles Anent the Present Civil Government* (Edinburgh: T. Rudimans, 1744), 46ff, Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*.

the social, political, and juridical structures of the state...'⁵ However, from its Reformation, Scotland developed and implemented its model of Church and State. While most famously illustrated in the words of Andrew Melville, 'thair is twa Kings in Scotland, twa Kingdomes, and twa Jurisdictiones',⁶ it was *The Second Book of Discipline* (1578) that officially declared ecclesiastical power to be distinct from civil power. This was a view derived from John Calvin who wrote 'there is a twofold government of man; one aspect is spiritual...the second is political...There are in man, so to speak, two worlds, over which different kings and different laws have authority'.⁷ The two kingdoms doctrine was integral to the Reformation and Post-Reformation theology of much of Protestant Europe.⁸ But Scotland stood out among other nations in its attempt at implementing the doctrine. Presbyterians integrated the doctrine with potent covenantal motifs from the late sixteenth century.⁹ Samuel Rutherford and George Gillespie ably defended the two kingdoms theory of the *Second Book of Discipline*,¹⁰ and made it a foundational standard within Presbyterianism. Later and more radical Covenanters, such as Alexander Shields, John Brown of Wampray, Alexander Peden, and James Renwick amplified such views within their writings during their bitter struggle against the Stuart monarchy. This has led to notions that Presbyterianism's two kingdoms theory necessitated radical anti-government politics.¹¹ After the 1690 re-establishment of Presbyterianism the theory remained within Chapter XXIII of the *Westminster Confession*, but engendered a less radical outlook.

⁵ David G. Mullan, *Episcopacy in Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1986), 2.

⁶ Robert Pitcairn, ed., *Autobiography and Diary of Mr. James Melville* (Edinburgh: Wodrow Society, 1842).

⁷ J.T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles, ed., *Institutes*, 2.15.3,5, 4.20.1.

⁸ James Kirk, *Patterns of Reform* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 236-240, David VanDrunen, 'Two Kingdoms Doctrine and the Relationship of Church and State in the Early Reformed Tradition', *Journal of Church and State* 49 (2007). This article compares Geneva's Francis Turretin's 'two kingdom' doctrine with Scotland's Samuel Rutherford's writings. VanDrunen concludes that both theologians are not only in agreement, but on balance with Calvin.

⁹ Donaldson, *Scotland: James V-James VII*, 314-316.

¹⁰ Coffey, *Rutherford*, 208.

¹¹ Perceptions that Presbyterianism remained 'anti-government' during the eighteenth century are discussed at length by Kidd, 'Scots Covenanting Tradition'. This assumption still persists in modern studies. See Gordon Donaldson, *Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), 92-95.

It was Scotland's 'Second Reformation' that brought to fruition this conception of Church and State relations. The two kingdoms theory was a by-product of the federal schema. Both kingdom powers, distinct in their roles, were understood as divinely ordained for the purpose of promoting piety in Christian society. Jesus Christ, as the second person of the Trinity held a universal kingship. As the incarnate mediator and redeemer he was viewed as king over the visible Church. As God and creator he ruled over the world. The kingdom over the Church had its authority from the mediatorial reign of Christ. The Church was to be based entirely on biblical principles consisting of people devoted to God and its ministers called by God, duly elected, and ordained. The State had its power and authority directly from God the Creator and lawgiver. Earthly kingdoms were to work for the enrichment of common life. The State, enforcing the moral law for society's well-being, was to comprise the citizens of the Christian nation with godly magistrates set over them. The mediatorial kingdom ruled over the saints of the Church by maintaining purity in doctrine, discipline, worship and Church courts. Both kingdoms possessed divinely ordained officers; the Church had ministers, elders and deacons and the State had a civil magistrate. However, as the magistracy had a duty towards the Church, its care and defence, Church members also owed allegiance to the State as citizens. Thus, two independent but co-ordinated governments, the one ordained by God for the material and social good of the Christian nation, the other, the kingdom of Christ the mediator for the Church's salvific and spiritual good.¹² This was a conception of a Christian commonwealth where Church and State were envisioned as functioning in a collaborative effort and mirroring biblical Israel under the Sinaitic covenant. But finding and maintaining much consensus on this notion was an unreality.

¹² James Kirk, ed., *Second Book of Discipline* (Edinburgh: St.Andrews Press, 1980), 1.9-10,14-15.

A number of historians have been divided over the implications of the two kingdoms doctrine. Some have portrayed the doctrine as essentially theocratic,¹³ while others have viewed Scotland's relationship of Church and State as encompassing two distinct roles.¹⁴ Theocracy was the perception of the aristocracy of the time.¹⁵ If theocracy was a logical, or extreme, implication to the two kingdoms doctrine in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, eighteenth-century covenanting Presbyterians were strikingly silent on such notions—if not opposed.¹⁶ Thomas Mair (1701-1768), who joined the Seceders in 1737, preached in 1728 that 'The church and commonwealth of Israel were far from being made the same'. The 'Sinaitic dispensation' 'expressly distinguished' between them by making 'their officers, laws, and ordinances...distinct'. In the same way, 'under the new Testament, Church and State are so far from being blended or mixed together'. He stipulated that 'while each engage not to encroach upon the office and station of the other' through their own 'station and sphere', they 'promote the interest of Christ and one another'. He also stipulated that 'right covenanting to duty' 'is an excellent mean[s] of maintaining a clear distinction betwixt them'.¹⁷

After the 1733 Secession, the national dimensions of Scotland's covenanted status had become obscure. Both the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians sought to maintain a robust focus on practical piety within the framework of federal theology. However, both had to readjust some preconceived expectations toward advancing the Covenanting past's

¹³ One of the first to make such an assessment was W.L. Mathieson, *Church and Reform in Scotland* (Glasgow: Maclehose and Sons, 1916), 59-62. Others would follow: J.H. Leckie, *Secession Memories: The United Presbyterian Contribution to the Scottish Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1926), 9. Donaldson, *Church History*, 234ff, Francis Lyall, *Of Presbyters and Kings: Church and State in the Law of Scotland* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1980), 17, Walter Makey, *Church of the Covenant* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1979), 10-11, 31ff, 59-60. Alan R. MacDonald, 'Ecclesiastical Representation in Parliament in Post-Reformation Scotland: The Two Kingdoms Theory in Practice', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 50 (1999): 39,40.

¹⁴ Coffey, *Rutherford*, 208.

¹⁵ Kidd, 'Scots Covenanting Tradition'.

¹⁶ Brown, *Historical Account*, 9, David Walker, *Candid Examination of the Rev. Mr. Hutchison's Animadversions...* (Glasgow: W.Smith, 1782), 13. Undoubtedly, some Church of Scotland ministers acknowledged the two kingdom theory. See for example, Charles Stuart, *The Distinction between the Kingdom of Christ and the Kingdoms of This World...* (Edinburgh: 1777).

¹⁷ Mair, *Duties*, sermon 9.110.

religious or political goals. The Reformed Presbyterians much preferred a pre-1690 ecclesiastical and pre-union (1707) arrangement. The Seceders acquiesced to the idea of a British State, but did so without forsaking the hope of seeing the 'Covenanted-Reformation' continued in the 'Kingdoms' of England, Scotland and Ireland.¹⁸

Part I.

Differing reasons for Covenanting

The proceedings that surrounded the 1743 'Renewing' of the Covenants by the Associate Presbytery ignited a series of schismatic events that restructured Scottish religion into denominations and gradually dismantled the potency behind federal theology's corporate applications. While the Associate Presbytery renewed the Covenants with the aura of historic grandeur, this renewal ceremony differed from what took place in 1712 by the more politically vocal 'United Societies'. The Seceders' renewal entailed a statement of qualification—the 'Bond of the Covenant'.¹⁹ The 'Societies' 1712 renewal qualified nothing. The Seceders' 'Bond', drafted by William Wilson²⁰, would be renewed in subsequent years. In 1743, the Reformed Presbyterian colonists conducted a ceremony of covenanting at Middle Octarara, Pennsylvania. This was simply a ceremony aligning the 'True Presbyterians' in the American Colonies with Scotland's covenanted legacy by distinguishing the new world's covenanted faithful from the covenanted backslidden.²¹ But it was on Scottish soil, in 1745, that the Covenants were again renewed without qualification by the newly constituted Reformed Presbytery.²² Their *Historical Testimony* described it as 'the last instance in which the public Covenants were renewed in the Reformed Presbyterian Church'. Even after they ceased renewing the Covenants, the Reformed Presbytery's

¹⁸ Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 5. *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 95,100-102.

¹⁹ *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 81.

²⁰ John Tod, *Elder Logan's Story of the United Presbyterian Church* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1897), 43.

²¹ Craighead, ed., *Octarara*.

²² Hutchison, *R.P. History*, 163,190.

inclination toward subscription to the Covenants as a ‘term of communion’ never diminished in the eighteenth century.²³

After the Associate Presbytery had published their *ACDG*, they published its *Act* for the ‘Renewing’ of Scotland’s Covenants. The *Act* had served as their definitive statement on the practice of corporate covenanting and outlined both the Burgher and Antiburgher Synods’ positions on civil magistracy until the 1790s. From the outset, differing reasons lay behind renewing the Covenants. In an attempt to stimulate revival, the Seceders determined that they were ‘led-out in the course of sovereign and holy Providence’ to revitalize the practice of covenanting. This was, at least in their view of Scotland’s history, the only means by which the ‘reformation of religion’ could advance as it had during the covenanted ‘golden age’ of 1638-1650.²⁴ According to John Brown of Haddington, ‘After about seven years’ advertisement’, the Seceding ministers agreed on a ‘bond’ for covenanting.²⁵ Such an admission demonstrates that considerable forethought had gone into how Scotland’s Covenants could be renewed within the eighteenth-century context. It also demonstrates that the Secession’s founders had anticipated the addition of others zealous for the covenanted cause, some from within the Established Church and some from the ‘United Societies’. Such a period of ‘advertisement’ also indicates that it took time to develop a polemic for Covenant renewal and establish a ‘consensus’ among themselves. Shortly before the Associate Presbytery’s renewal ceremonies, they engaged in a monumental debate that distinguished their position on Scotland’s Covenants from the Reformed Presbyterians, and created considerable confusion within their own ranks. The debate stemmed from a diversity of historical opinions regarding Church and State and precarious perspectives on civil magistracy. Specifically, this debate occurred over the wording and purpose of the ‘Bond’ attached to the Covenants. The Seceders’ ‘Bond’ had the effect of determining the positions

²³ Reformed Presbyterian Church, *Testimony*[1866], 126, 273-274, 237-238. Hutchison, *R.P. History*, 190.

²⁴ *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 81, 82-94. See also Chapter 2.

²⁵ Brown, *Historical Account*, 51.

for both Secession and Reformed Presbyterians on Church and State relations. It also opened the door for irreparable divisions within the Secession Church.

Unlike their seventeenth-century predecessors who perhaps, as David Mullen suggested, ‘opportunistically’ meddled with national politics,²⁶ the Seceders were compelled to act only within the ecclesiastical system in light of the Revolution Settlement’s civil establishment of religion. The Seceders were discontented with what they perceived as Scotland’s Parliamentary failures in 1690, to advance the achievements of the ‘Covenanted Reformation’. Their perceptions of the General Assembly’s failures within the Settlement itself, the 1707 union of parliaments, and the reintroduction of patronage after 1712 incensed them.²⁷ Rather than attacking the civil government the Seceders faulted the General Assembly, ‘who’ in their estimation, ‘did not, in their Ecclesiastical Capacity, faithfully and particularly represent unto all Ranks of Persons through the Land, their manifold iniquities and Backslidings in order to excite them to Humiliation and Mourning before the Lord’. The Seceders argued that the General Assembly had settled ‘upon the...Civil Establishment, without remonstrating against what was defective’ in it ‘or making any...acknowledgment of the many heinous backslidings of the former Period’.²⁸ Circumspectly, the Seceders acknowledged that

since the wonderful *Revolution*, Anno 1688, the three Kingdoms have been rescued, by the surprising Favour of God, from intolerable *Tyranny*, *Popery*, and *Slavery*: And this Presbytery dare not, without ingratitude to God, and injustice to the Subject presently under Consideration, *dissemble or lightly esteem* the *stigma* then put upon the infamous government of the former Period: The *Justice* and *Honour* done to the *Cloud of Witnesses* and *Sufferers* through the same, by the *Act* rescinding *Fines and Forfeitures*; as also, what *Security* is given, by the *present* Civil-Government, unto our *Religion, Lives, and Liberties*, such as *no other* People now on Earth enjoys the *like*.²⁹

The Seceders asserted that Scotland’s religious settlement ‘since the Revolution’ had become increasingly ‘corrupted’, ‘*apostatized* from, and grievously *defaced*’. Thus, they admitted that the issue for them was neither the swearing of allegiance to the present civil government

²⁶ Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism*, 322.

²⁷ Brown, *Historical Account*, 15-19.

²⁸ *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 101-104.

²⁹ Associate Presbytery, *Answers*, 50-51.

nor imploring congregants toward civil disobedience from the perceived dissolute principles of the Hanoverian monarchy. Instead, they advocated a mediating view:

As by the Word of God and our Covenants, we are *inviolably bound*...to confess, oppose, and testify against all the *Corruptions* and *Evils* of the *present Civil Government* over these nations, whereby, the *Reformation*, *once established* therein, has been *departed from*, *opposed*, or *overthrown*: OUGHT we not at the same Time...*acknowledge the Civil Authority* of the said Government, in the Administration and Commands thereof that are *lawful*, and *yield Subjection* thereunto in *these Circumstances*?³⁰

Moreover, the Associate Presbytery did ‘beseech and obtest’ ‘all’ under ‘their Inspection’ and in direct response to the criticisms levelled by the ‘United Societies’ and ‘Thomas Nairn’ ‘to watch against the snares of this Time, particularly, in setting the Duty of testifying against the Apostasy and Corruption of our Rulers and Body Politick, in Opposition to the Duty of yielding Subjection and Obedience to the present Civil Authority over these Nations, in lawful Commands’. Yet, this emphasis by the Seceders held a deeper significance. They hoped to persuade their congregations of the ‘Duty’ ‘to be deeply humbled before the Lord’ for the ‘grievous Apostasy and Corruption, not only in the Church, but in the State’ so as to ‘wrestle with the God of Jacob, upon the Footing of his gracious Promise’. This was a plea for spiritual revival.

Therefore, according to the Seceders, it was ‘the Duty of the Lord’s people to adhere unto the Standard of a *publick Testimony* against Corruptions and Defections, Civil and Ecclesiastical’. This produced their yearning for the ‘true’ Church of Scotland to lead the way in renewing Covenant obligations. The Seceders insisted that if any authentic national transformation was going to occur, their own congregations had to ‘observe the Divine Order in working Reformation, so as every one may, through the Grace of our Lord Jesus, study *personal* and *Family* Reformation of the *Church*, according to the Word of God and our Covenants, as *introductory* unto Reformation in the *State*, which likeways will natively introduce Reformation in Places of *publick Power* and *Judgement*’. The Seceders may not have liked how Britain’s monarchy and parliament governed, but in their minds the means to

³⁰ Ibid., 55-56.

advancing true 'Reformation' in Scotland needed to come through peaceful and religious means rather than anarchical means.³¹ If the Church would rectify its covenantal 'backsliding', particularly in its doctrine, discipline, and judicatories, so too might the State follow in its path of 'Covenanted' reform and recapitulate, in some sense, the 1638-1650 'golden age' of Covenant reforms.³² For the Seceders, the way forward was through a dynamic spiritual awakening. Matthew Hutcheson's *History* (1893) indicated that the Reformed Presbytery's 'complaint was that the [Secession] *Testimony* did not go far enough, that it was too exclusively limited to matters that concerned the Church, and did not fully contend for Reformation attainments in the State, even while it condemned manifest defects.'³³ Revival, as it was understood by the Seceders, could only begin with Covenant renewal—robustly performed by individual and Church. Influential Church of Scotland evangelicals like John Willison, certainly 'approve[d] of covenanting-work', 'whether it be National, Presbyterial or Congregational' for stimulating revival. Yet, writing in 1744, Willison thought the Seceders had gone too far. He found the Seceder's 'Bond' to the Covenants a 'calumnious Oath' drafted in 'intemperate Zeal', 'contrary to our *Westminster Confession*...chap. 22', and not in the 'Cause and interest' of Christ' because it made covenanting '*the*' only means to personal, ecclesiastical, or national revival.³⁴

Whitefield Controversy

Simultaneous with the Seceders' discussions of Covenant renewal was their encounter with George Whitefield (1714-1777). The Seceders infamous falling-out with Whitefield illustrates the mid-century Church of Scotland's theological shift away from federal theology's corporate dimensions and the Seceders' aspirations for revival. It also is a clear example of how the Seceders believed that Covenant and revival should correspond.

³¹ Ibid.

³² *ACDG*, iv-14.

³³ Hutcheson, *R.P.History*, 207.

³⁴ Willison, *Fair and Impartial*, 131-134. Willison's objection was covenanting being upheld as the exclusive term of Christian communion.

Whitefield's arrival in Scotland in 1741 to minister with the Seceders has received significant attention, much of which has focused on the Seceders' imperious dispute and subsequent vitriolic literature against Whitefield's revival preaching.³⁵ But there was a larger theological context at stake. In a 1739 letter, Whitefield rejoiced in the Seceders' 'work of reformation' within the Scottish Church. Yet, he expressed uneasiness with the Seceders' emphases on Scotland's national obligations stemming from their federal theology. Whitefield had been reading Ralph Erskine's sermons which of course venerated the Covenanting 'Martyrs' and Scotland's 'Covenants'. Whitefield humbly confessed his ignorance of Scottish Presbyterianism, and said that he only desired clarification on whether the Seceders' were planning on 'taking up the sword in defence of religious rights'. He noted how an 'English Bishop' he knew claimed that the Seceders were 'cameronians' and anti-government.³⁶ The Erskine brothers had ostensibly quelled those fears, as indicated by Whitefield's 1741 arrival in Scotland to preach with them.

The Seceders were, however, opportunists who sought to use Whitefield's reputation—as from 1733-1741 they were in the midst of finding a consensus position for Covenant renewal.³⁷ The Seceders felt that by including Whitefield's famed Trans-Atlantic revival-preaching within their covenanted cause, a strategic advance might be made toward ecclesiastical or nation-wide revival. If Whitefield could become a spokesman for the revival of the Seceders' covenanted reformation, what might be the results? Perhaps the Seceders thought they could absorb enough evangelicals from the Established Church to re-

³⁵ Most studies follow Arthur-Penrhyn Stanley, *Lectures On...The Church of Scotland* (London: Murray, 1872), 136-138 and, David Woodside, *The Soul of a Scottish Church* (Edinburgh: United Free Church of Scotland, 1917). Many discussions on Whitefield's interaction with the Seceders seemingly lack historical-theological context. The precise details of the meeting between Whitefield and the Associate Presbytery are scantily available. Secondhand sources lack reliability—and what frequently has been proposed lacks theological context. For example, Herron, *Kirk by Divine Right*, 70-72.

³⁶ George Whitefield, *Works*, 7 vols., vol. 1 (London: C.Dilly, 1771-1772), 128-129.

³⁷ Brown, *Historical Account*, 51.

constitute a purer Church ‘in’ Scotland.³⁸ The Seceders remained hopeful that if Whitefield would participate in their revivalist cause, he would see the uniqueness of Divine-Right Presbyterianism and embrace the connection between the Covenants and revival. Even M’Kerrow’s sanitized history of the infamous meeting indicated that the Seceders’ had insisted that Whitefield agree with them that ‘Presbyterian government’ was ‘the pattern shown in the mount’ [Sinai].³⁹ Whitefield, of course, was unconvinced by the Seceders’ theological arguments that Scotland’s Christian remnant resided solely within the Associate Presbytery’s jurisdiction because of their identification with covenant theology and demand for ecclesiastical purity. Whitefield was unaware of Scotland’s historical connection with revival and Covenant renewals. After meeting with the Associate Presbytery, Whitefield stated in a 1741 letter that the Presbytery was not in agreement over how to proceed with his *laissez-faire* approach toward the Covenants. Whitefield even referred to a presbyter with ‘warmer’ zeal who felt the Erskines showed too much deference toward an ‘English’ ‘born’ non-Presbyterian.⁴⁰ Instead of pursuing broad evangelical principles, the Seceders and later the Reformed Presbyterians demanded the narrow way of revival as in the days of old—through Covenant. Certainly Whitefield was Calvinistic, but he was not Presbyterian nor was he sold on the idea that Divine favour rested on either the Scottish Church or nation because of the Covenants. Whitefield was unwilling to identify himself with the Seceders’ insistence that Scotland’s revival remained contingent upon Covenant obligations. Undoubtedly, Whitefield’s sole interest in preaching individual conversion did not sit well with the Seceders’ concern to reconcile corporate Covenant obligations. Neither did it sit well with the few evangelicals within the Church of Scotland still committed to Covenants.⁴¹ The Seceders were keenly aware of federal theology’s corporate dimensions being threatened with the spread of broader evangelical impulses. It is not insignificant that Adam

³⁸ John Currie, *Plain Perjury and Great Iniquity of the Seceding Brethren's New Covenant...* (Edinburgh: Lumisden-Robertson, 1744), 58-59.

³⁹ M’Kerrow, *History*, 157.

⁴⁰ Whitefield, *Works*, 307.

⁴¹ James Fraser, *Lawfulness and Duty of Separation...* (Edinburgh: 1744), xxxvii.

Gib bemoaned how Whitefield had introduced broad evangelical principles with non-federal theological views into Scottish Presbyterianism which led many to dismiss covenanting as the means to revival.⁴²

The revivals of 1742, at Cambuslang and Kilsyth, which centred on Whitefield's preaching, drew severe criticism from the Seceders and Reformed Presbyterians. Both groups argued that the very 'Covenanted' religion of Scotland was endangered by the 'Prelatic', 'Erastian' Whitefield who was unconditionally welcomed by Church of Scotland evangelicals little concerned with Scotland's Covenanting past and far less concerned with preserving federal theology's corporate dimensions.⁴³ Evangelicals in the Church of Scotland attempted to counter such claims by publishing pamphlets that still defended Scotland's Covenants and confessional conformity.⁴⁴ Federal theology in Scotland was not merely about individual religious experience. It had much to do with how the past Covenant obligations related to the present and how the spiritual heritage of Church and nation hung in the balance.⁴⁵

Revival in the apostate Church of Scotland represented a threat to both the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians, who theologically believed that the Lord could only bless by way of Covenant. The Reformed Presbyterians also found Whitefield and the Communion revivals of Cambuslang and Kilsyth nothing more than abominations because the Covenants remained absent. They also abhorred the notion that God would use a 'Prelatic Priest' who detested the Covenant to convert souls.⁴⁶ The Whitefield controversy and the evangelical revivals of Cambuslang and Kilsyth confirmed that the covenanting zealots' theology and

⁴² Adam Gib, *Present Truth: A Display of Secession-Testimony*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Fleming & Neill, 1774), 219-220.

⁴³ *Asso. Presbytery Records*, 16 June 1742. Alexander Wesbster, *Divine Influence...Of the Extraordinary Work at Cambuslang...* (Edinburgh: 1742), 63-64, Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, 126-127.

⁴⁴ For example, *Apology for the Presbyterians in Scotland Who Are Hearers Of...Whitefield...And Stands Justified by The...Confession...And...Solemn League and Covenant*, (Edinburgh: Lumisden-Robertson, 1742), 29.

⁴⁵ James Fisher, *Review Of...A Narrative of the Extraordinary Work at Kilsyth* (Glasgow: J.Bryce, 1742), 54.

⁴⁶ *Declaration of the True Presbyterians...Concerning...Whitefield...And...Cambuslang*, (Glasgow: 1742).

interpretation of Scotland's past could be questioned—indeed challenged—by new experiences of spiritual revival. Ministers who had participated in the Cambuslang and Kilsyth revivals became influential evangelicals in the Church of Scotland and Relief Presbytery and hastily put aside the corporate dimensions of federal theology for the broader evangelical theology which focused more on individual salvation.⁴⁷ The Whitefield controversy also demonstrated that simultaneous with the waning of ecclesiastical unity was the increase in the sense of individuality. Eighteenth-century covenanting remained a vindication for seventeenth-century theological 'truth' and reminded everyone that there were social-political implications still pending on Scotland.

Renewals and Controversy

At the same time, a number of zealous Presbyterians still held tightly to the Covenanting period's politics.⁴⁸ They had not only refused the 'establishment' of the Revolution Church, they also refused to acknowledge the civil government. After continuing to meet as the 'United Societies', they were joined by John McMillan in 1706, a former Church of Scotland minister at Balmaghie, Kirkcudbrightshire.⁴⁹ Seven years after the Covenant renewal ceremony 'at Auchensaugh' some of its participants lamented that 'after we have had so much woful[sic] Experience' from the seventeenth-century, 'we' should have learned that 'our Reformed-Covenanted Nation, should not only have at the Revolution, accepted the *Prince of Orange* to be King, while he joined with and sware to support *Prelacy*, and after him *Princess Anne of Denmark*, treading the same Steps...have [gone about] explicitly...abandoning our Covenanted Interest...and corroborating of Prelacy'. Thus, in the language of civil disobedience, they resolved:

⁴⁷ John Erskine and Thomas Gillespie serve as examples. See Roxburgh, *Gillespie*, 56ff.

⁴⁸ According to the Reformed Presbyterian Church, *Summary of the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland* (Glasgow: 1932), 35, at the time there were about twenty individual meeting-groups making up the 'United Societies' with a total membership of some 7,000.

⁴⁹ There were several other smaller splinter groups claiming the abiding authority of the National Covenants and disclaiming the uncovenanted monarchy of William and Mary and later Queen Anne. For additional information on some of the more radical splinter groups, see William McMillan, *John Hepburn and the Hebronites* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1934).

Upon...Betrayings of their Trust, we do judge the Persons chiefly active in these Courses have by the Laws of GOD, and this Realm Forfeited all just RIGHT, to enact laws, binding upon us, or any of the true Subjects of this Kingdom; And protest, That we Resolve through Grace, not to conform with any of these their sinful Acts, or Ordinances, they have enacted, or may further enact and issue forth.⁵⁰

The 'Societies' maintained this radical position until many of them accepted the Reformed Presbytery's *Testimony* in 1743, which refused to recognize Britain's uncovenanted government.⁵¹ The Associate Presbytery immediately endeavoured to disassociate themselves from this vocally radical remnant by acknowledging political differences with them. They presented their view that covenanting was founded on the moral law, warranted by the 'precepts and examples' from the Old and New Testaments, and by what they considered an abundance of providential occurrences as evidenced in Scotland's (covenanted) history. Therefore, the Seceders resolved to renew the Covenants '*in a way and manner agreeable to its present situation and circumstances*'. To this end, they appointed a committee to prepare an '*Overture anent the Renovation of our solemn Covenants*' and the 'Bond' of agreement which would satisfy its ministers and 'meet the situation and circumstances' of mid-century Scottish-Britain.⁵²

However, the Seceders faced an immediate challenge with renewing the Covenants. They perceived it to be 'unreasonable' to renew them in their original forms, as had been done by the 'United Societies' in 1712.⁵³ Covenant 'renovation' or 'renewal' implied a 'solemn avouching of the Lord', not only of the primary obligation which the moral law placed on the Christian, but also of the secondary obligations 'established by former oaths or covenants to prosecute their originally intended ends'.⁵⁴ Thus, the Seceders developed their 'Bond', which softened their Covenant renewal for the eighteenth-century political context.⁵⁵ The very idea of the 'Bond' stirred heated debate within the Presbytery. While the Presbytery

⁵⁰ *True Copy of the Declaratory Published at Auchensaugh...July 1718*, (Edinburgh: 1719), 10-11.

⁵¹ *Petitions*, Ch3/269/42.

⁵² *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 92-96, 81.

⁵³ Gib, *Present Truth*, Vol.1, 260, 259-274.

⁵⁴ Moncrieff, *Covenanting*, 21-23, 65-68.

⁵⁵ *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 81.

indicated that Covenant renewal had been their objective from the beginning, unanimity among its various presbyters was not so easily achieved. The Presbytery publically admitted how its appointed 'Covenant-Renovation' 'Committee' had produced 'sundry Readings, Reasonings and Amendments for the 'Bond' over 'Seven Years'. On 'October 21, 1742 by the unanimous Vote of all Members present, excepting Mr. Nairn' the Presbytery finalized the 'Bond'.⁵⁶ Adam Gib indicated that the Presbytery's intention behind the new 'Bond' had to do with historic precedent. He noted that 'the former method of renewing the *national Covenant*...[was by way of] a *Bond*—accommodating the same to the circumstances of the church and land, at the several times of the renovation'.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Thomas Nairn (1680-1764) defiantly held back the proceedings of the Presbytery and their covenanting ceremony. At issue was the interpretation of 'renewal' and 'renovation' as either an 'historic precedent' or, more radically, as an exacting imposition of the literal 1638 National Covenant. This debate proved to be the genesis of many difficulties surrounding eighteenth-century covenanting and became a substantial factor behind the infamous 'Breach'.

Accordingly, the Seceders' 'Bond' condemned 'the dangerous extreme' that 'some have gone into' by 'impugning the present civil government over these nations, and subjection thereunto in lawful commands, on account of the want of those qualifications which magistrates ought to have by the Word of God and our Covenants, even though they allow us the free exercise of our religion, and are not manifestly unhinging the Liberties of the Kingdom'. Indeed, they cited this as

An Opinion and Practice *contrary* to the plain Tenor of Scripture, and to the known Principles of this Church, in her Confession and Covenants, and of all other reformed Churches; And that *some few* others carry their Zeal against the Defections and Evils of the Times, to the dangerous Extreme of espousing Principles in favours of propagating Religion by *offensive Arms*; quite *contrary* to that Disposition, which ought to be in all the professed Followers of Christ, who came not to destroy Men's Lives, but to save them.

⁵⁶ Ibid. Brown, *Historical Account*, 51.

⁵⁷ The 1638 National Covenant was based on the National Covenant of 1580-81, but suited to the time through a bond. Gib, *Present Truth*, Vol. I, 222.

Such statements disturbed the 'Societies', who felt that the Seceders had altered the legitimate method of Covenant renewal.⁵⁸ They soon 'declared a war against the Pestilential sect of the Seceders, for their mad and stupid Loyalty to the Idolatrous Throne of Britain...by Mangling, curtailing and clipping our Solemn-Covenants...'⁵⁹ Most of the Seceders had aimed to duplicate the historic pattern of renewal with their 'Bond', and not a mere reassertion of the 1638 and 1643 Covenants. However, the Presbytery's statement was not unanimously agreed upon. Thomas Nairn 'formally dissented' from 'the *paragraph* that confessed the Evil of the *Anti-government-Scheme*'.⁶⁰ Neither did the *Act's* caustic statement suit Alexander Moncrieff and William Campbell.⁶¹

In 1743, Nairn, Moncrieff and Campbell took their colleagues to task. According to M'Kerrow's *History*, they 'objected'

on the ground that the cognizance of civil affairs belongs not to a church judicatory; and, as the Presbytery had already declared that it was not proper to swear civil allegiance in an oath imposed only by the church; so, if the sinfulness of opposing the magistrate in his just rights were confessed in the acknowledgment of sins, upon which the bond reduplicated, this would be equivalent to a blending of civil and ecclesiastical matters in the oath of God.

Thus, on the advice of Moncrieff and Campbell the Presbytery made the statement the subject of a separate *Act*.⁶² While Moncrieff and Campbell were placated per se, Nairn remained defiant. He dissented from the *Act* that condemned 'the dangerous extreme' 'of impugning the present civil government's' authority along with the Presbytery's *Act for Renewing the...Covenants* because the 'Bond' altered the original Covenants. The Presbytery asserted that the basis of civil government fully rested on the premise that a magistrate was instituted by God as creator and moral governor of the world, but was also common to all humanity and not merely Christian nations. Nevertheless, the magistrate was to remain subservient to the good of the Church. Likewise, government was to benefit a

⁵⁸ Hutchison, *R.P.History*, 206-208, 184-185, Reformed Presbytery, *Magistracy Settled Upon Its Only True Scriptural Basis...* (Edinburgh: 1747), 33.

⁵⁹ *The Active Testimony of the True Presbyterians of Scotland...* (Edinburgh: 1749), 21.

⁶⁰ *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 81-83, 96.

⁶¹ *Asso.Presbytery Records*, December 23, 1742, February 3, 1743, *Associate Presbytery and General Associate Synod Scroll Minutes, 1745-1751*, (N.A.S, CH3/144/4), September 26 1745

⁶² M'Kerrow, *History*, 185.

nation by using the prescribed pattern of morality found in the Bible for the preservation of order and restraint of wickedness.⁶³ 'Subjection to the present civil-authority', argued the Seceders, was 'not in any way inconsistent with our Covenant-allegiance'.⁶⁴

Nairn soon renounced the authority of the Presbytery for altering the Covenants' original wording.⁶⁵ His determination to see the 'Renovation of the Solemn Covenants' unchanged from 1638 and 1643, and his insistence that 'acknowledging the present civil government was inconsistent with our ancient covenants', led to the Associate Presbytery issuing a *Declaration and Defence of Principles Anent the Present Civil Government*.⁶⁶ Therefore, the Associate Presbytery defined its position of magistracy:

The publick good of *outward* and *common* Order in all *reasonable* Society, unto the glory of God, is the *great* and *only* end which those invested with magistracy *can* propose, in a *sole* respect unto that office. And as, in prosecuting this End, *civilly*, according to their office, it is *only* over Mens good and evil works that they can have any inspection, so it is *only* over these which they must need stake Cognizance of, for the *said* publick Good. While at the same time, their doing so must be in *such* a Manner, and proceed *so far* *allenary*, as is *requisite* for *that* End, without assuming any lordship immediately over Mens *Consciences*, or making any encroachment upon the *Special-Privileges* and *Business* of the *Church*. And, moreover, as the whole *Institution* and *End* of their office *are cut out by*, and *ly within* the Compass of *natural-Principles*, it were *absurd* to suppose that there could or ought to be *any Exercise* thereof towards its end, in the foresaid circumstances, but what can be *argued for*, and *defended* from, *natural Principles*; as indeed there is *nothing* especially allotted and allowed unto Magistrates, by the *Word of God* and the *Confessions* of the *Reformed Churches*, but what can *be so*. Now, it must be *agreeably* to all THIS, that the Apostle signifies Magistrates to be *God's Ministers for Good*; concerning themselves with *good and evil works*,—in a way of *Terror, Praise, or Revenge*: For he does so in a *sole* respect unto their *Civil Office*.⁶⁷

Later, John Brown reflected that it was the 'earnest prayer' of the Associate Presbytery that 'God' 'would make our sovereign king George, and every subordinate magistrate, hearty friends to, and promoters of a covenanted-work of reformation. They were, however, firmly persuaded, that difference in religion did not make void, or, in the least annul their just power and authority'. This was why, 'In the late [Jacobite] rebellion, many of them voluntarily bore arms against the pretender; not one of them appeared on his [Prince

⁶³ Associate Presbytery, *Answers*, 70, 71ff, Gib, *Present Truth*, Vol. I, 311ff.

⁶⁴ Associate Presbytery, *Answers*, 14.

⁶⁵ M'Kerrow, *History*, 186. Nairn was excommunicated in 1750 by the Antiburghers according to Hutchison, *R.P. History*, 193.

⁶⁶ Associate Presbytery, *Answers*, 44ff.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 70, 71ff.

Charles'] side'.⁶⁸ The Seceders supported a tolerant, Protestant and British crown, but rejected Nairn's insolence toward the *status quo* of an uncovenanted monarchy. This was a crucial distinction, and one that set them apart from the 'Societies'. Nairn's disquiet over the renewing of the Covenants was never fully dispelled. Neither was his subtle discontent over acknowledging the 'present civil authority'. Shortly after the heated Presbytery debate, Nairn joined John McMillan to constitute the Reformed Presbytery from among the 'Societies' on August 1, 1743.⁶⁹ Now a clear political demarcation between two theologically like-minded groups, both claiming the same covenanted heritage, was set in stone.

Both groups subscribed fully to the *Confession's* broad position on *the Civil Magistrate*.⁷⁰ Accordingly, both covenanting groups asserted that the State established the Church by law. This did not imply that the State could determine or review the judicial policies or deliberate on its theological positions. However, there were differences between the Seceders and the Reformed Presbyterians over the civil magistrate. On the one hand, the Seceders maintained that the foundation of the office came from natural law. Hence, the statements 'The publick good of *outward* and *common* Order in all *reasonable* Society' and '*ly within* the Compass of *natural-Principles*'.⁷¹ On the other hand, the Reformed Presbytery insisted more rigidly that God 'hath authorised and instituted in His Word the office and ordinance of civil government and governors' because it had 'its foundation in the moral-preceptive law of God'. Hence, the magistracy was 'for the preservation of external peace and concord, administration of justice and encouragement of such as are and do good, and punishment of evil-doers who transgress either table of the law'.⁷²

⁶⁸ Brown, *Historical Account*, 51.

⁶⁹ Hutchison, *R.P.History*, 157.

⁷⁰ Associate Presbytery, *Answers*, 25, Reformed Presbytery, *Magistracy*, 135, 187.

⁷¹ Associate Presbytery, *Answers*, 71.

⁷² Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 198, 192.

The Seceders had adopted a slightly broader and more progressive position by developing civil government from 'natural principles'. Resisting 'Erastianism', the Reformed Presbytery still preserved the position held by the seventeenth-century Covenanting martyrs that Christ, not a British monarch, was the 'alone Head and King of the Church'.⁷³ Both emphatically claimed that for the governance of Christian States like Scotland (or Britain), magistracy should possess certain qualifications. But the Seceders asserted a softer tone as to the qualifications. While they never denied, they did not insist, that the magistracy be covenanted as in the 'covenanted-reformation's' 'golden age' of 1638-1650. Similarly, the Seceders asserted that a 'due measure' of such 'qualifications and Duties' was 'essential not to the *Being* and *validity* of the Magistrates Office, but to its *WELL-BEING* and *Usefulness* thereof'.⁷⁴ The Reformed Presbyterians insisted such qualifications, as expressed in the moral law, were essential for any magistrate to govern Christian nations.⁷⁵ The Seceders objected to what they saw as latent Erastianism within in the constitution of the national Church. The Reformed Presbyterians, while agreeing with the Seceders that the national Church's constitution was corrupted, ultimately laid blame on the State, which they claimed brokered the 1690 ecclesiastical settlement in Erastian terms to begin with.⁷⁶ They demanded a covenanted civil magistrate; 'a sovereign' having 'Scriptural and Covenant qualifications' and one who would not interfere with what they perceived were Church prerogatives.⁷⁷ The Seceders maintained that since the Revolution Settlement had become 'corrupted', it had become obvious that Scotland's '*ancient Civil Reformation*' and 'golden season' 'betwixt 1638-1650' had been apostatized from, and grievously defaced' to the point of no easy return. However, they believed that biblical rudiments for the two kingdoms model were still recognizable enough within the Revolution Settlement, and guaranteed with

⁷³ Ibid., 7-8ff, 55.

⁷⁴ Associate Presbytery, *Answers*, 80, 78ff.

⁷⁵ 'Essential' 'Qualifications' are discussed at length throughout Reformed Presbytery, *Magistracy*, 178.

⁷⁶ Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 72-74, 77-78.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 42.

the *Act* of Security at the time of Union, to give them reason for hope.⁷⁸ They desired to establish themselves in Scottish society as a relevant ecclesiastical entity, old in the ways of ‘doctrine, worship and discipline’, but new as the evangelical branch of the national Church.⁷⁹ Theirs would be one that would meet the politically neutral position of the Church as demanded by the Revolution Settlement, and one that would flourish apart from the Established Church without State interference. Yet theirs would be a Church that did not forsake those principles vital to true Presbyterian piety. Hence, they insisted that a magistrate was to rule well, granting tolerance to Scotland’s Presbyterian principles, protecting and advancing the Protestant religion in Britain, while steering clear of interference in ecclesiastical polity and doctrine. Christians were ‘under a moral and indispensable *Tye* unto Civil Communion’ with their magistrates.⁸⁰ More realistically, the doctrinal positions of the two kingdoms doctrine and magistracy as interpreted by either the Seceders or Reformed Presbyterians remained only historical ideals within the changing socio-political atmosphere of the eighteenth century. As a consequence of these differences, the Seceders refused to disown the British government, while the Reformed Presbyterians protested it, instead choosing to maintain their peaceable but vociferous independence from it.

Seemingly, for the Seceders, there was a practical reality behind their view of Church and State. In an ‘Overture’ by the Burgher Synod dated 1751, several errant ‘facts’ concerning the seventeenth-century Covenanting period detailed within the historical prologue of *Act for Renewing the Covenants* were corrected. Published in 1755, the pamphlet likely functioned as a polemic against numerous allegations made by the Reformed Presbyterians and Antiburghers that the Burghers had failed to maintain the historic ‘Covenanting’ tradition. Interestingly, the Burgher ‘Synod’ ‘acknowledge[d], that as the people who propagate the

⁷⁸ Associate Presbytery, *Answers*, 50-51, 53ff.

⁷⁹ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, vii-ix.

⁸⁰ Associate Presbytery, *Answers*, 94, 89.

anti-government scheme of principles, do profess to swear to a *covenanted* king, which may *possibly be* over these nations, and who may *probably never be...*' to be 'a very absurd and unreasonable' position. Such a position, the Burghers argued, 'seems to be a taking the name of the Lord in vain, to swear to do a duty, for the performance whereof, we have no probability, that we shall ever have any occasion' to experience. Undoubtedly, this was more of a slap in the face to the Reformed Presbytery than the Antiburghers. While it perhaps demonstrates the rationale behind the Seceders' 'Bond', more certain is their practical reasoning behind yielding to Britain's monarchy.⁸¹ The Seceders wanted to avoid any aggressive coercion or formal protestation of the monarchy's disinterest toward the Covenants. The view of the Reformed Presbyterians was that the 'Seceders acknowledged the present [magistracy] as lawful, and their duty to be subject to, and support them as such'. But the Reformed Presbytery asserted in no uncertain terms that 'the covenants require no other than a lawful magistrate'—one covenanted at least as much as Charles I and II.⁸² The Seceders maintained that the Bible, *Confession*, and Covenants taught submission to government as long as that government did not interfere with the prerogatives of the Church.⁸³ They were adamant that the Reformed Presbyterians were 'not going forth by the approved footsteps of the flock of Christ as in past generations. The old and new testament church...were subject, for ages and generations, to far worse princes than any of the Hanoverian line, and yet were blameless'.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, a covenanted monarchy surely remained an earnest hope of the Seceders, but the inalterable goal of the Reformed Presbyterians.

⁸¹ Associate Synod [Burgher], *Draught of an Overture to the Associate Synod, Relative To...Historical Mistakes Alleged...In the Act, Declaration, and Testimony...* (Glasgow: 1755), 64.

⁸² Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 163.

⁸³ Associate Presbytery, *Answers*, 25.

⁸⁴ William Fletcher, *The Scripture-Loyalist: Containing a Vindication of Obedience to the Present Civil Government...* (Falkirk: Patrick Mair, 1789), 18, 13ff.

The Burgess Oath and Later Debates over Covenant Renewal

With the Associate Synod re-covenanted in 1743, a connection between the Nairn dispute and the controversy surrounding the Burgess Oath is observable. By 1745 the Associate Presbytery had experienced significant growth, totalling 25 ministers and 41 congregations. Hence, the Presbytery divided into three Presbyteries which were united as the Associate Synod.⁸⁵ In light of such growth and in loyalty to their *Testimony* for the 'Covenanted Principles', the newly designated Synod sought to remove any impediments to re-implementing the practice of covenanting among its congregations.⁸⁶ But voices of disagreement soon resounded.

Alexander Moncrieff was first to note a conflict of interest within the covenanting cause. He saw the Secession's 'Covenanted-Principles' as incompatible with the newly instituted Burgess Oath of 1745, and in particular a short religious clause within it.⁸⁷ Soon Moncrieff's reservations were echoed by Thomas Mair and Adam Gib who felt that the 'Oath' was inconsistent with the Secession *Testimony*, their 'Bond' and Covenant renewal.⁸⁸ The issue was whether or not those in communion with the Associate Synod could consistently swear religious statements imposed by an uncovenanted monarchy and the backslidden judicatories of the national Church. In some British burghs, the 'Oath' was to be taken by those claiming the privileges of burgesses, or those of the urbanized merchant class. Only burgesses could legally engage in commerce, participate in politics, or belong to trade guilds. This made the 'Oath' a critical issue for the Secession's expansion, particularly for its eldership who engaged in local commerce. The 'Oath' was a political strategy by the Hanoverian monarchy which aimed to ensure that those who clandestinely might be loyal to the Stuarts could not publicly favour the exiled 'Pretender', Charles Edward. It was also intended as a

⁸⁵ Gib, *Present Truth* Vol.2, 14. M'Kerrow, *History*, 196-197.

⁸⁶ Gib, *Present Truth* Vol.2, 2.18.

⁸⁷ Forrester, 'Gib': 152.

⁸⁸ See the Burgher account by Brown, *Historical Account*, 53-54, as well as the Antiburgher account by, Gib, *Present Truth* Vol.2, 19ff.

civic action against Roman Catholicism which was feared to be the underlying cause of Jacobitism. These fears were stirred by the recent 1745-1746 rising led by Charles Edward.⁸⁹ Making matters worse for the Seceders, the religious clause in the 'Oath' was ambiguous. Ostensibly, some interpreted it as an endorsement of the Church of Scotland judicatories, which the Secession detested. Others interpreted the 'Oath' in a general sense to mean the Reformed faith as opposed to Roman Catholicism. The religious clause, differing slightly from Burgh to Burgh read: 'Here I protest before God, and your Lordships, that I profess, and allow with my heart, the true religion presently professed within this realm, and authorized by the laws thereof: I shall abide thereat, and defend the same, to my life's end; renouncing the Roman religion called Papistry.'⁹⁰ The Associate Synod convened three times in 1745 to discuss the matter, with each meeting intensifying in divisiveness. The party, later known as the 'Burghers' found the clause unexceptionable. But the other party, the 'Antiburghers', maintained that the 'Oath' was inconsistent with the entire Secession *Testimony* and covenanted Synod.⁹¹ After two years of debate, on 9 April 1747, the Synod split. The Burgess Oath controversy was the most virulent rupture among the eighteenth-century covenanting zealots. Two distinct Secession Synods now existed.

The controversy, popularly known as 'The Breach', was not unconnected to the practice of covenanting.⁹² After all, the debate was connected with other themes in federal theology, such as swearing oaths and the national Church ideal. The 'Breach' perpetuated extreme animosity between the two Secession groups for the next four decades, which implicitly weakened a once unified movement that sought a revived national religion. As late as 1780,

⁸⁹ Forrester, 'Gib': 152.

⁹⁰ Gib, *Present Truth Vol.2*, 20-21. See also, Sherman Isbel, 'Burgess Oath', in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, ed. Nigel de S. Cameron (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

⁹¹ M'Kerrow, *History*, 227.

⁹² Alexander Moncrieff, *An Examination of the Pretensions Made by the Separating Brethren...* (Edinburgh: Thomas Lumisden 1747), 7-11, Gib, *Present Truth Vol.2*, 25-26, Archibald Hall, *Appeal to the Public in Four Parts...* (Edinburgh: Gavin Alston, [1771?]), 19.

James Ramsay (1748-1824), an Antiburgher minister in Glasgow, voiced his discontent with the Burghers in a sermon where he declared,

we cannot confess... that it is lawful to swear a Burgess oath, bearing that we are resolved to abide by the true religion presently professed, and by law established in this country, amounting to an oath with full and lasting communion with the [National] church; or that covenanting is a duty of moral obligation, and yet plead, that it is not to be attempted as a mean of reformation in our times—times of the greatest corruption and backsliding...⁹³

However, given the evocative ecclesiastical context where oaths, vows, and the swearing of Covenants had become passionate statements of Scotland's piety, it is no surprise that such a disruptive dispute could take place over an ambiguous phrase. Between 1747 and 1797 the two Synods competed with each other, both claiming the inheritance of the Covenanters.⁹⁴ Impugning each other's inconsistencies with their 'Secession *Testimony*', particularly over how often and when the 'Bond' and Scotland's Covenants ought to be renewed, the interpretation of the Sinaitic covenant within federal theology took centre stage once again.⁹⁵

Further Controversy: Frequent or Infrequent Covenanting?

Both Synods were in agreement that covenanting was an extraordinary practice of piety that combined several doctrinal themes of federal theology that enhanced experiential religion. Both recognized that corporate covenanting was to be performed during extraordinary circumstances. Both also stipulated that corporate covenanting ought to be performed as the providence of God was revealed through critical societal circumstances. Likewise, both agreed that personal covenant duties were to be renewed with some frequency.⁹⁶ Hence, William Moncrieff maintained that 'the Jews'

⁹³ James Ramsay, *Public Confession of Christ Illustrated, and the Obligations to It Stated* (Glasgow: John Bryce, 1780), 14.

⁹⁴ M'Kerrow, *History*, 643-644. The Burgess oath was eventually eradicated in 1819, leading to a reunion of sorts within the Secession movement in 1820. The united groups became formally known as the 'United Associate Synod.'

⁹⁵ The Antiburgher James Morison and Burgher Archibald Hall were the primary, but not the sole figures in this debate. Archibald Hall, *Impartial Survey of the Religious Clause in Some Burgess-Oaths... 'Wherein the Nature and Seasons of Public Covenanting Are Explained...'* (Edinburgh: Wilson, Robertson, & Tennent, 1771), iii-xvi, Hall, *Appeal to the Public*, 8-15. Brown, *Historical Account*, 62-63, Gib, *Present Truth Vol.2*, 355-380, Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 70-71.

⁹⁶ Hall, *Impartial Survey*, iv-viii, Young, *Evangelical Covenanting*, 38.

renewed their covenant in a way and manner suited to their circumstances. To be sure all religious covenanting, when suitably set about, is nothing more than a solemn adhering to the word of God: but this is to be done in a way suited to the circumstances of the people that enter into such a Covenant; namely, by a confession of breaches of covenant, in a land already under such engagements—and answerable engagement to duties; as was the case among the Jews of old.⁹⁷

Soon debate arose between the Synods over how frequent Covenant renewals should be performed. This debate spiralled into another long-lasting, heated pamphlet dispute. The phrasing of ‘renewal’ employed by the Associate Presbytery’s *Act* was misleading from the start. It implied that the original Seceders’ intentions for Covenant renewal were the same. From the time the Associate Presbytery first discussed Covenant renewal, it is evident that little consensus existed. Retrospectively, Thomas Nairn’s dispute and the Burgess Oath controversy magnified differing opinions about covenanting within the Secession movement. The Reformed Presbyterians, following in the same vein as Nairn’s positions, also publicly declared their variant understanding of Covenant renewals as well.⁹⁸

Adam Gib recalled that ‘Covenanting-work was accordingly gone about in two congregations’, ‘Abernethy and Ceres’.⁹⁹ These were the congregations of Alexander Moncrieff and William Campbell, both key figures in the Nairn and Burgess Oath controversies. ‘But the question...which occurred...about the religious clause of some Burgess-oaths—put a stop to further progress of that work...till some time after the Breach of the Associate Synod, in the year 1747’. Later, ‘the solemn-work’ was ‘carried forward’ by ‘several congregations’ of Antiburghers. Gib added, ‘the work has been several times gone about, in the generality of settled congregations—in some, six or seven times; not repeatedly by the same persons, but by new persons who offered themselves...’ to the covenanted ideal.¹⁰⁰ Since the ‘Breach’, the Antiburghers had accused the Burghers of

⁹⁷ Moncrieff, *Observations*, 34. See also Muirhead, *Foederal Transactions*, 345-346.

⁹⁸ Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 163ff, 169.

⁹⁹ Gib, *Present Truth*, Vol. I, 1.254. M’Kerrow also mentions Thomas Mair’s congregation at Orwell as taking part, M’Kerrow, *History*, 192.

¹⁰⁰ Gib, *Present Truth*, Vol. I, 1.254.

failing to renew regularly Scotland's Covenants.¹⁰¹ James Morison vehemently argued against the Burghers for what he surmised to be confessional infidelity. He saw them as violating Covenant obligations because,

When the whole body of Seceders were in one associate presbytery, it was agreed...that a joining in the bond for the renovation of our covenants should be a term of ministerial and Christian communion amongst them: But ever since their espousing the religious-clause of some burgess oaths, that bond of our union one with another is avowedly broken by them. The bond for the renovation of our covenants is not only laid aside as useless, but rejected as faulty. Persons are admitted to full-communion amongst them, without so much as acquaintance with either the Bond or the Testimony. The truth is, while they have charged the *Testimony* with manifold faults and falsehoods, without coming to any determinate judgment about what those faults and falsehoods are; the *Testimony* can be no standard of adherence to a covenanted-reformation among them, whatever they may give out about their still cleaving to it.—They broke with the Associate Synod.¹⁰²

In the early 1770s the Burgher Synod's theologian Archibald Hall responded to such allegations of infidelity to the Secession *Testimony* and covenanted cause. He first asserted, 'I have not one wish for the continuance of the controversy' regarding the Burgess Oath. He then noted that his 'only aim' was 'to state the whole cause in the most impartial light...' Hall maintained he could not 'condemn the Burgess Oath upon the grounds the Antiburgher-synod have done' because

I am a Presbyterian in principle and practice: and believe that the whole doctrine concerning church-government delivered by the Westminster Assembly, is according to the Scriptures. Nor will I yield it without conviction, that I have departed from scriptural covenanted-principles of the church of Scotland; far less, can I allow, that I have renounced them. This is one of the random, vague accusations, managed with more zeal than integrity, against the Burghers.

What followed was the Burgher Synod's rationale behind their infrequent 'Covenant-Renovation'. 'Covenanting' 'could only be an occasional duty, and ought to be regulated by a proper regard to times, places, and circumstances'. The Burghers defined 'proper' 'times, places and circumstances' as:

When the church is brought into a situation, which contains a Providential call to some important duties connected only with her present condition; or, when she is in Providence brought into a situation, whereby her members are in great danger of falling from their own steadfastness; or, when a general reformation is to be accomplished:—in any of these circumstances, a public covenant or vow *may be made* unto the Lord, concerning the performance of these duties, the avoiding of these dangers, or the reformation from these sins

¹⁰¹ Hall, *Appeal to the Public*, 8.

¹⁰² Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 92-93.

and errors. These are the only cases, wherein the church is authorised by Scripture example or command, to make a covenant concerning sin or duty, truth or error.¹⁰³

Now another question emerged: Could a previous Covenant be renewed? Such a debate incited the Reformed Presbyterians to offer their condemnation of the whole Secession debate and *Testimony*. A document published in 1750 by the Reformed Presbyterian elder James Leslie demonstrates an irritation with the Seceders' overall position on Covenant renewal. Most interesting is that he, writing on behalf of the Reformed Presbytery, viewed the debate as irrelevant. They felt that the Seceders had betrayed the covenanted cause from the time they had first issued their 'Bond', because they made covenanting solely ecclesiastical instead of national. The pamphlet outlined that

the Seceders pretending to renew our...Covenant[s], yet will be found to be Burying them under a solemn Oath...they have spoken Words, swearing folly in making a Covenant...The renewing of our National and Solemn League and Covenant being a national Deed, it must be done in a national Capacity, viz. by State and Church conjunctly; that is to say, by espousing the representative Powers of State and Church: And seeing the present Magistrates are Malignants, unjust and ungodly, we must chuse out of all the People, able Men, Men of Truth, fearing God and hating Covetousness...Such as will be a Terror to evil Doers, and a Praise to them that do well, in order to cause the People to stand the Covenant.¹⁰⁴

As late as 1821, the Reformed Presbyterian Church asserted, 'It is the duty of the Christian Church, occasionally, in her social capacity, to vow and covenant unto the Lord, embracing the covenant of grace for the performance of all covenant duties, to confirm their unity, and maintain their stability in the Christian cause'.¹⁰⁵

Against the Seceders, the Reformed Presbyterians were adamant that their covenanting remained congruent with Scotland's Reformation heritage. They protested that 'tho' our reformers did renew the covenants with a new bond, and perhaps very seldom swore them without some additions, yet they never went back from any part of reformation, espoused and sworn to in the renovations that were before them, under a pretence, that such points of

¹⁰³ Hall, *Impartial Survey*, iii-iv, vi-xv. Also reprinted in, Hall, *Appeal to the Public*.

¹⁰⁴ Reformed Presbyterian Church, *Declaration and Testimony AGAINST...Injuries Done to Our National and Solemn League and Covenant, by the Pretended Associate...Brethern* (Edinburgh: 1750), 6-7.

¹⁰⁵ *Summary of the History, Principles and Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church...*, (Paisley: Stephen Young, 1821), 51.

reformation formerly attained, were unsuitable, or not adapted to their circumstances, as Seceders have done'. 'On the contrary', they asserted that,

our reformers, in all the different renovations of the covenants, not only included all that was formerly attained to, binding themselves in strict adherence to all the articles priorly in the oath and covenant of God, (at the same time solemnly acknowledging all the former breaches thereof; and obliging themselves, in the strength of grace to the performance of the contrary and consequential duties;) but also, still went forward in explaining and more explicitly applying the covenants against sins of their day, and more expressly binding themselves to the opposite duties, as is clear from the bond wherewith our reformers renewed the covenants 1638, and the solemn acknowledgment of sins, and engagement to duties, 1648; both which the Seceders have barefacedly cast by and exploded in their alleged renovation...whereby, as it is manifest that our reformers always went forward, to further degrees of reformation, so it is no less manifest, that [the Seceders] acting contrary to them, have gone backwards.¹⁰⁶

In the 1760s, the Antiburgher James Morison expressed his aggravation with those of the 'anti-government way' 'for making a mighty outcry against us, for not using the word *extirpate*...' He felt the Reformed Presbyterians were too reactionary. The Seceders' decision to soften the wording of the Covenants and attach the 'Bond' was indicative of their desire to remain relevant to their day and to distance themselves from seventeenth-century radicalism. Thus,

to extirpate Popery, Prelacy, &c. in the sense in which the word is used in the Solemn League,—is intirely incompetent unto us, and consequently, nowise incumbent on us...Besides, everybody knows, that the meaning of words varies, according to new senses put upon them; and the word *extirpate* has of late years been mostly taken in a sanguinary sense, and used to denote a violent persecution by offensive arms. But to use it in this sense here, were to act the part of the Papists, not of Protestants; of madmen, not of Christians.¹⁰⁷

Morison affirmed the need for frequent renewals. However, as a good Seceder, he desired in no way to revive the seventeenth-century's tumult. He valued the 'Bond' as making Covenant renewal relevant to the interests of ecclesiastical revival. The debate illustrates the varying intentions and lack of consensus behind federal theology's corporate applications.

However, Archibald Hall and the Burghers thought that frequent renewals of 'former Covenants' were neither theologically sound nor historically documented. In response to the Antiburgher position, they explicitly called into question the entire history of Scotland's

¹⁰⁶ Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 162-163.

¹⁰⁷ Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 135.

covenanting and the intent of the (original) Seceders' *Testimony*.¹⁰⁸ Again, crucial to the debate was whether the Sinaitic covenant was renewed by Israel, or whether subsequent biblical covenants were entirely new covenants of duty. 'Scripture-covenanting', argued Hall, 'is always described as a *transaction entirely new*. It is never once called the renewing of a former-covenant; but is constantly said to be a *making*, or *entering into a covenant*, *without any recognition on any former covenant*...I challenge any person to produce so much as one instance from the Bible, of either Jews or Christians renewing a former covenant by any future oath'. The Burghers accused the Antiburghers of repeating Thomas Nairn's error (and thereby the error of the Reformed Presbytery) of wanting to duplicate the covenants of 1638 and 1643 along with their 'Acknowledgment of sins' without a 'bond' 'suitable to the present circumstances'. Hall argued that 'Every intelligent reader of the presbytery's answer to Mr. Nairn's objection against the seceding bond' could see '*That it was a quite different oath from the old Covenants, under the pretence of renewing them*'. Likewise, he asserted that in that document 'the presbytery has proved, both from *Scripture, and precedents, and common sense*, the absurdity of...Nairn's idea of RENEWING RELIGIOUS COVENANTS'. 'The Presbytery' argued Hall and the Burghers, 'proved' 'That every transaction in covenanting, is a completer oath in itself, and distinct from every former or other oath...NO RELIGIOUS COVENANT CAN BE A PROPER RENOVATION OF A FORMER COVENANT'. Thus, what had 'misled' the Antiburghers was 'the title of the presbytery's act, "for RENEWING the national covenant of Scotland and the Solemn League...of the three nations"'. 'But the following part of that title', argued Hall, 'was overlooked'. It explained what sort of renewal was originally intended by the Seceders in 1744—"in a way and manner agreeable to our present situation and circumstances in this period"". He further maintained that the Covenants 'which the presbytery kept in their eye as a *pattern* of their bond, and the obligation whereof they

¹⁰⁸ Brown, *Historical Account*, 61-63. They also implicitly questioned the position of the Reformed Presbytery.

represent as a *motive* that induced them to frame and swear it,—were not part of their new oath, but were prefixed in a preamble, as other and distinct covenants.’ Thus, according to Hall and the Burghers, the Antiburgher’s position on covenanting ‘was not managed upon the scripture-plan’.¹⁰⁹

Adam Gib’s *Present Truth* (1774) was a defense of the Antiburgher position. It also argued against the accusations that the Antiburghers had repeated Nairn’s errors of Covenant renewal. But Gib had little trouble affirming that ‘the method of renewing the Covenants which the Presbytery proposed, is really a renewing of them, without dissimulation’. This, he argued, is ‘agreeable to the example of our reformers’. In Gib’s mind, the former national ‘Covenants’ were still binding—indeed more so—with the Seceders’ ‘Bond’ making them applicable to eighteenth-century Scotland’s ‘present circumstances’.¹¹⁰ Hall and the Burghers disagreed with this and accused the Antiburghers of covenanting just to be ‘in opposition to others’ and promote themselves as the most doctrinally faithful church. For Hall, covenanting had to have a legitimate purpose. According to the true ‘scripture-plan’ of covenanting, the practice was to be done for ecclesiastical solidarity in extreme circumstances calling for revival, reformation and a witness to Presbyterian orthodoxy. Hall had found the position of Gib and the Antiburghers on frequently renewing the same Covenants inconsistent, because it had not acknowledged the ‘sins and breaches’ against God and Covenant since the original ‘Bond’ of 1744. Hall was amused by what he considered to be a revisionist interpretation of the Covenanting period by the Antiburghers. He rebuked ‘Gib and his friends’ who seemingly acknowledged Scotland’s evil ‘as standing grounds of the Lord’s controversy with [the] generation...between 1650 and 1743!!! None of them before 1650; and none since 1743!!!’ It is significant that in 1771 Hall had begun to voice hesitancy over venerating Scotland’s so-called seventeenth-century ‘Golden-Age’.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Hall, *Appeal to the Public*, 10, 11-13, 17.

¹¹⁰ Gib, *Present Truth*, Vol. I, 272. See also the extended argument against Nairn, 252ff

¹¹¹ Hall, *Appeal to the Public*, 21, 79.

The Burghers' view of Scotland's seventeenth-century Covenanting period dictated their theological position to the point where they began to espouse a less zealous view of covenanting. But Hall's criticism of the Antiburgher Synod and the Reformed Presbytery's positions was primarily based on biblical interpretation. If the Sinaitic Covenant was never renewed in its original constitution by Israel, neither could Scottish Presbyterians think to do so either.

It will not invalidate my opinion about *renewing religious covenants*, that the covenants made by Israel and Judah were all the same in substance; nor will it follow, from this principle, that every following covenant was a renovation of all the former covenants they had entered into...all their covenants were the same in substance...But there was no repetition of any former covenant when they made a new one; nor did they ever, directly or indirectly, intimate, that they referred to any former covenant their fathers had made, when they covenanted for themselves on any occasion whatever. The case may be illustrated by a familiar example.—When Christians live by faith, or walk in love, they are often repeating the same exercises of mind, and performing over again the same duties; yet, no man who understood the gospel scheme, would call their repeated exercising of faith *a renovation of their former exercise of it*; or their repeated acts of love *a renewing of their former acts of it*. In the continued living by faith, and walking in love, the Christian should fix his whole attention, not on what he has attained to, but on the faithful word and sovereign authority of Jehovah. The very same was the case of the Jews, who entered into covenant with God; and the same should be the case with Christians too in their covenanting, according to that express directory, Rev.iii.3. "Remember how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent."''¹¹²

Hall and the Burghers had forged a position with more biblical, historical and practical foundations than their brethren. Therefore, Hall offered his unmitigated conclusion:

that the national covenant was never ITSELF sworn since the years 1580 and 1581, as the Associate presbytery have clearly proved...whenever it was renewed (as the common phrase is), *a new oath was always made*, and ought always to have been made, for that purpose: and the national covenant was *never intended to be sworn again upon the footing of its original form*, or in its *original words*, or even in its first *meaning*, with respect to persons, time or things, which the presbytery have also made evident...From all which it follows, (1.) That the Burghers are unjustly complained of, for not renewing our solemn covenants. (2.) That their business must be, when they find covenanting a seasonable duty, *to make or enter into a new or distinct oath*, and not to renew a former covenant. (3.) That their opinion about the religious clause of some burgess-oaths, can never be an obstruction to their covenanting upon that plan. And (4.) That it is a great mistake to suppose, that the *swearing of the Seceding bond*, which is so very little adapted to the present circumstances of 1771, *is a swearing of the covenants of our forefathers in the last centuries*; and it is a greater mistake still, to imagine, that the swearing of said bond is *swearing adherence to the covenants of our ancestors*: for, allowing the seceding bond to be of a like nature with the covenants of our progenitors, the said bond was always intended to be a complete oath in itself, and a new transaction distinct from both the national covenant and the solemn league.

¹¹² Hall, *Impartial Survey*, xvii-xix.

According to the Burghers, it was ‘most unfair and unjust’ to be charged with ‘denying any’ ‘covenanted- principles, because they do not renew the covenants of [the] fore-fathers’ in exact detail.¹¹³ Hall had become convinced that the Antiburghers ‘look[ed] upon covenanting’ more ‘as a bearing witness against others, than as an engaging to reform themselves, and to perform their own duty’.¹¹⁴ The Burghers stood by the Associate Presbytery’s covenanting services of 1744. However, unlike the Antiburghers, they never again conducted public covenanting within their ranks.

Legacy and Revival

Ostensibly, the unresolved position on the purpose(s) behind covenanting remained extant among the Seceders from 1733-1747. A bifurcation between covenanting as ecclesiastical or political had persisted among them. Covenanting carried with it ideals of spiritual heritage and notions of revival. After all, Israel renewed its Covenant in the midst of spiritual awakenings.¹¹⁵ If true piety could be achieved within the Church, it was believed that the political impediments to a pure Presbyterian ideal would be removed for the State to change course as well. Scotland’s revivals were closely associated with the covenanting events of 1580-81, 1638, and 1643, and served as historic precedents.¹¹⁶ It was hoped that Covenant renewal might stimulate a similar revival. On this, Burgher, Antiburgher and Reformed Presbyterians were agreed. But Covenant renewal also served as an historic connection to the legacy of maintaining Scotland’s true Reformed religion. Each group claimed their heritage from the seventeenth-century Covenanters, who were seen as Presbyterian reformers. However, there were motivational differences between the covenanting sects when it came to Covenant renewal.

¹¹³ Ibid., xiii, ix.

¹¹⁴ Hall, *Appeal to the Public*, 17.

¹¹⁵ For example, Exodus 19-20, 34, and King Josiah’s renewal of Israel’s Covenant in 2 Kings 23.

¹¹⁶ Associate Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 12-16, Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 10-12.

Differences between the Reformed Presbytery and the Seceders can be observed by their own self-perceptions of connectedness to Covenanting history. The Reformed Presbytery accentuated national covenanting in a way much more connected with the historical, or providential, actions of an unfolding covenant relationship between God and Scotland. They venerated the seventeenth-century Covenanters' struggle to reform Church and State. They envisaged a Presbyterian hegemony in Scotland to be achieved through the State's submission to the Covenants. Likewise, they remained convinced that any disregard of those Covenants, as the Church and Scottish Parliament had done in 1690, or any alteration to them as the Seceders had done, would nullify the heritage of the seventeenth-century Covenanting 'martyrs'.¹¹⁷ While not altogether dissimilar to the Seceders, devotional piety and ecclesiastical solidarity remained significant motivations behind the practice. However, the Reformed Presbytery's ultra-reverential views of the Covenanting martyrs and their firm commitment to support only a covenanted magistrate garnered much of their polemical attention. This is not to say that the evangelical dimension was absent from the developing Reformed Presbyterian Church.¹¹⁸ Yet, theirs was an intransigent fervour to return to the nation's Covenanted 'golden age'. Reformed Presbyterians continued the seventeenth-century's argument that resistance to an uncovenanted monarchy was obligatory.¹¹⁹ The Seceders found such a view anachronistic and emphasized that resistance to a tyrannical magistracy during extreme circumstance, was only optional. They even concluded, that the Covenanting martyrs 'rejecting Civil Government', was entirely different from what the Reformed Presbyterians 'were taking up'.¹²⁰ The legacy the Seceders had envisioned was more progressive in its connection with the Covenanting past and national documents. They primarily envisioned 'Covenant-Renovation' as the model of their revival-minded predecessors. Secondly, they viewed the service of 1743 as a solemn rededication to the

¹¹⁷ *True Presbyterians*. Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 62, 104.

¹¹⁸ The Reformed Presbytery was concerned with Evangelical doctrine. This is evidenced by their acceptance of *Marrow* doctrine. Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 185ff.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 199-201.

¹²⁰ Associate Presbytery, *Answers*, 94.

principles of the ‘Second Reformation’—purity of Reformed doctrine, worship, discipline, and government. These principles they regarded as necessary to the success of a national (Presbyterian) Church capable of reviving a decaying spiritual legacy within Scotland.¹²¹

Hugh Watt rightly had observed that ‘the Seceders hold that loyalty to their forefathers only demands a form of Covenant in harmony with their high resolves, and incorporating what they take to have been their fundamental religious principles’.¹²²

The Seceders’ primary concern was for a covenantal holiness—fidelity to the covenant of grace and obedience to Divine law. This was determined by them to be the foundation of a pure Presbyterian, national Church. Ralph Erskine’s famous sermon on the evening of the Associate Presbytery’s ‘covenant renewal’ service of 1743 illustrates this point: ‘The solemnity of this very day hath been great and remarkable, and somewhat exactly parallel to it you have in these words’[from]‘Deut.xxvi.17-18’, he noted. ‘From the preceding verse, God, by his servant Moses, binds all duties of obedience to his divine commands, upon this people of Israel’ and as Erskine and his companions saw it, the Church.¹²³ Similarly, and on the same historic day, his brother Ebenezer preached with startling expectation: ‘Blessed be God there is some small degree of a resurrection of these solemn covenants, by what has been lately transacted in this place [Stirling].’ He added, ‘The covenants of a church are her glory; God’s covenant of grace and promise, and their covenants of duty and gratitude. It is said of the Old-Testament church, “To them belonged the adoption, the glory, and the covenants.”’ Ebenezer Erskine further asserted that a national Covenant was ‘the church’s charter for all her immunities and privileges, visible, for the life that now is, and that which is to come... These are the glory of a church and land, as they were unto the church of Israel.’ Such a powerful biblical analogy demonstrates that the Seceders’ intentions to rejuvenate covenanting were motivated by aspirations of ecclesiastical revival and purity. Hence,

¹²¹ *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 81-83.

¹²² Watt, *Recalling the Scottish Covenants*, 81.

¹²³ Erskine, *Covenanting Work*, 220.

Erskine noted that just as 'God avouched them to be his peculiar people, and they avouched him, by solemn covenant, to be their God...on which account they are called...a people married to the Lord', so also was the Associate Presbytery, the new covenanted remnant of the Church of Scotland. The Associate Presbytery believed that the 'purity, holiness, and faithfulness of church-members' could lead to spiritual revival in Scotland, and perhaps, a religious transformation in the mould of the 'covenanted reformation'.¹²⁴

The Associate Presbytery also emphasized that their interest in covenanting was as a practice of piety rather than politics by precluding any civil implementation of the Covenants. Their initial *Act* (published in 1744) clarified that 'to blend civil and ecclesiastical matters in the Oaths of God in renewing the Covenants' was a conflict of interest 'because the Cognizance of *Civil affairs* belongs not to them as a *Church Judicatory*'. They recognized the seventeenth-century's violent religious conflict, or in the very least its sour rhetoric against the monarchy, had the potential to be repeated by the 'Dangerous extreme' of Cameronian persuasion.¹²⁵ However, they also acknowledged that times had changed. Gone were the days of absolute monarchy. This was a clear shift of emphasis in covenanting in that the civil aspects were subordinated to the ecclesiastical. A seemingly outdated practice, covenanting no longer served the purpose of binding Church and State together in religious and political solidarity. This was the crucial alteration from the seventeenth-century Covenanting ideal. It was not that the seventeenth-century Covenanters had seen little ecclesiastical value in covenanting. Their difficulties were with the Stuarts' interference in Church affairs by insisting that Scotland embrace Episcopalian government and worship. Doubtless, the issues raised by Thomas Nairn and debated by Moncrieff, Campbell and others before the 'Breach' were attempts to clarify this position. Hence, prior to their covenanting ceremony, the Associate Presbytery noted the difference between what seventeenth-century Presbyterianism faced and their own:

¹²⁴ Erskine, *Christ Considered*, 941-942.

¹²⁵ *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 82-83.

The Powers whom *they* rejected, did differ not only as to their *Administration*, but as to their *Office* and *Kind*, from any we have now ado with. *King Charles II* after his Restoration, revoked and rescinded the *whole former Deed of the Body Politick*, investing him with Magistracy; as instead of holding his Office immediately by the Will of the Body Politick, he, by Consent of Parliament, renounced any Holding of *them*, and...proceeded in the Exercise of an *habitual and horrid Tyranny*, which came to an unparrall'd height, Anno 1681...to support Military Force, for *suppressing* the Meetings of the Lord's People, in the publick Profession of his Name and covenanted Cause...And, *James VII* did tread and proceed in his steps... Our suffers then, were in a quite *different* Situation from any in this Period. Not only were they *tyrannically* imposed upon, to give express Acknowledgment of the then Authority; but they were...denied all Benefit of law, and *devoted* unto Destruction...So they were by no means proceeded *erroneously* in their rejecting of the Civil Government.

But neither were the Seceders interested in even entertaining the idea of what they termed a 'dangerous extreme' 'of impugning the present civil authority over these Nations, and subjection thereunto in lawful commands, on account of the want of these qualifications, which magistrates ought to have by the Word of God and our Covenants'.¹²⁶ The Seceders believed it to be their 'duty to yield obedience and subjection' to the government, to offer prayers for it and even render support to the government when the Protestant religion of the land was threatened.¹²⁷ The Seceders sought to take advantage of the more tolerant eighteenth-century age of government, in which the monarchy 'allow us the free exercise of our religion, and are not manifestly unhinging the Liberties of the Kingdom'.¹²⁸ Whoever the civil magistrate was in the Providence of God and by the consent of the majority of the nation, he or she was to be respected as the 'lawful magistrate' of the land. Moreover, for the Seceders, Covenant renewal was at most symbolic for the nation; it was not on behalf of the nation. Covenanting was an action entirely ecclesiastical for them. Their interests, though not purely exclusive of civil nuances, utilized covenanting for the purposes of Scotland's ecclesiastical and spiritual revival. Therefore, the Seceders could proclaim that they were 'being led out, in the Course of Sovereign and holy Providence' and 'in the Revival of Covenanting' 'to essay the Revival of Reformation' in swearing the 'Bond' of the

¹²⁶ Associate Presbytery, *Answers*, 93-94, 95-96.

¹²⁷ M'Kerrow, *History*, 199-207. The Seceders formed several militias to defend the Hanoverian monarchy during the Jacobite rebellion in 1745-1746.

¹²⁸ Associate Presbytery, *Answers*, 95.

National Covenants.¹²⁹ But both Synods' ministers would begin to believe that the Covenanting legacy and politically charged portions of their *Testimony* created a barrier to evangelical religion and ecclesiastical solidarity.

During the later eighteenth century, the Burgher minister to the 'Scottish Seceders of London',¹³⁰ Archibald Hall, began to argue that covenanting was only an occasional act of worship for the Church. Hall noted that

Religious worship, in the full extent of it, is implied in *the obedience of faith*: and, therefore, though some of its *outward-circumstances* may be determined by prudence, every thing that pertains to *the substance of its services* must be adjusted by DIVINE INSTITUTION.—The *moral law* binds us to "receive and observe, to keep pure and entire all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in his word". When worship is not conducted upon this principle, it becomes odious in the sight of God, and unprofitable to them who are exercised in it with the greatest diligence and zeal.

Hall did not view his position as deviating from the Secession Fathers' original intent to retain covenanting for the promotion of piety. Rather, Hall viewed 'occasional covenanting' under 'extreme' circumstances as warranted by the Bible.¹³¹ Hall's discussion of covenanting in the context of worship rather than in the context of politics demonstrates how the practice was a foremost issue of piety for the Seceders rather than mere political ideology. It also demonstrated a renewed emphasis on moving away from political implications.

In 1771, the Antiburgher James Morison, doubtless writing in response to Hall and the Burghers' softer position on covenanting, was not interested in Covenant renewals because of his contentment with the Hanoverian monarchy. Morison saw frequent covenanting as a necessary means of ensuring ecclesiastical piety. Morison preached a series of sermons indicating that 'covenanted' Scotland was in 'breach' of its commitments to God. The lengthy sermon series never mentioned the Hanoverian government. Instead, it decried the low spirituality of the Church and 'land'. Morison's conclusion was that 'Right Covenanting

¹²⁹ *Act for Renewing the Covenants*, 81, 115-118.

¹³⁰ M'Kerrow, *History*, 872-874.

¹³¹ Hall, *Worship*, vol.1, Preface iii.

consists, more generally, of two parts; an acknowledgment of sin, and an engagement to duty' in obedience to the commands of God. He claimed that the Seceders' *'Bond for renewing our Solemn Covenants'* is opposed by many, chiefly on account of its reduplicating upon the *Acknowledgment of sins*. Backsliders cannot endure that their evils should be testified against. And here lies the chief spring of all the spite that is thrown out against covenanting in our day'.¹³² Elsewhere, Morison noted that 'James Smith, [Church of Scotland] minister at Newbern' and author of *'A Compendius Account'*, contemptuously wrote in 'opposition to covenanting'. Morison was angered that Smith misrepresented the practice by tying it to contested political discussions. Smith remarked,

"Let any part of the divine law, whether moral or positive, be pointed unto, requiring a state and a church; a civil and spiritual body of men, a kingdom of this world and a part of the kingdom of Christ; to unite and mingle together, and draw up certain articles which they can agree though some of them doubtful at least as to their lawfulness; solemnly swear to the observance of them and compel all others in the kingdom or nation, under all civil pains, to swear also to them: or requiring different nations, solemnly to enter into a common oath or league of that nature."

'But herein the Rev. Mr. Smith is widely mistaken', added Morison. 'There is a threefold misrepresentation' of covenanting. At issue, argued Morison, was that 'the whole kingdom ought to be professors of the true reformed religion' rather than by the 'profane' political manoeuvrings of the State and the Church together.

'Covenanting is one thing, and the annexing civil penalties—another. That our covenants were enjoined under all civil pains, is very true; and how far that might be justifiable in our worthy ancestors, is considered afterwards. But that any were persecuted for simply refusing to swear our covenants, is a supposition without any manner of foundation'.¹³³

This was precisely the emphasis the Secession Synods had placed on covenanting—it was an issue of worship. It could have political implications, but this was never the primary intent behind the practice. Their principal aspiration was an acutely experiential Calvinism that highlighted the sovereign Lordship of God over his people and demanded their fidelity to a Covenant relationship. This still affected how one viewed Church and State.

¹³² Morison, *Acknowledgment of Sin*, v.

¹³³ Morison, *Duty of Renewing Our Covenants*, 14-15.

Patrick Hutchison and the Relief Church

The second half of the century brought even sharper criticism of covenanting. Other critics had ‘become very noisy...with respect to covenanting’ complained David Walker (1745-1810), Burgher minister of Pollockshaws.¹³⁴ Patrick Hutchison (1741-1802), a Relief Church minister and writer who had trained at the Antiburgher theological hall once boasted of being zealous for the Secession cause: ‘I scarcely could think that any person was a Christian who was not a Seceder’. His views were to change. Upon joining the Relief Church, he scrupulously opposed the Secession’s older form of federal theology and covenanting. This he did within the context of championing the Relief Synod’s movement toward voluntarism and broader evangelical beliefs.¹³⁵ With a mocking tone, Hutchison seemed keen to engage in lengthy debates with the Burghers, and with David Walker in particular. Walker commented, ‘There is one particular, on which my opponent frequently pours out an irresistible torrent of abuse, namely, our maintaining covenanting to be a moral duty; but habitually neglecting the performance of it. And likewise, our distinguishing between [its] stated and...occasional duty’.¹³⁶ Hutchison attacked the Burghers for being inconsistent with their own theological ‘principles’ and in their covenanting practice. He argued in 1779 that the Burghers theoretically gave lip-service to covenanting in their confessional ‘principles’. These were identical confessional ‘principles’ which they shared with the Antiburghers who had remained consistent in practicing covenanting. He insisted that the Antiburghers ‘are consistent with themselves, as they rebuke their hearers, who offend...whereas the Burghers suffer their people to pass with impunity’.¹³⁷ While Hutchison’s argument sardonically drew attention to the Burgher’s infrequency of Covenant renewal, his more serious allegation was theological. He claimed, like other opponents of the Secession’s theology, that ‘under the gospel dispensation, no nation receives its system

¹³⁴ Walker, *Morality*, 3.

¹³⁵ Struthers, *Relief Church*, 247, 305-331.

¹³⁶ Walker, *Morality*, 6.

¹³⁷ Patrick Hutchison, *Animadversions of the Burgher Testimony* (Edinburgh: 1779), 21.

of civil laws from God as the Israelites did, nor is any nation under heaven bound to observe those civil and judicial statutes, which God gave to his people Israel, except as far as any of them were of a moral nature'.¹³⁸ While Hutchison still maintained a form of federal theology, he contended that the biblical covenants displayed more discontinuity than the Seceders were willing to grant. Hutchison argued that the experience of biblical Israel at Sinai was never congruous with that of the Scottish Church. He repudiated the binding obligations of Scotland's Covenants and saw no biblical warrant for the corporate application of federal theology.¹³⁹ Thus, Walker summarised Hutchison's arguments as finding '*the civil magistrate, and allegiance oath, a Canaan establishment, and a particular dispensation of the moral law, which the Jews were under*' to have been applicable to the Old Testament era alone.¹⁴⁰ Hutchison maintained that covenanting had become an ecclesiastical imposition on Scottish Christians. Therefore, Hutchison asserted that, within the covenant theology of the Bible, there were

capital distinctions between the Jewish commonwealth and the evangelical state...and that uniformity in religion, which was to be enforced by civil pains in that peculiar kingdom, respected the Israelites *only*, and is grossly abused when it is made a precedent for any uniformity of a similar kind until the Christian dispensation. Unless it can be shown from the word of God, that there is a Christian commonwealth constituted upon the same foundation with that of ancient Israel, which never hitherto has been proved...and never will be proved...

He further noted that 'had the proper distinctions between the Israelitish and evangelical state of things been well understood and observed' then 'British history never would have been stained with accounts of uniformities in religion, enforced by civil pains, either presbytery, Prelacy, or Popery; and men would have learned to promote the kingdom of Christ, which is, in its nature, spiritual and heavenly...'¹⁴¹ He went on to espouse a position of separation of Church and State, and found no credence for the Secession's view of magistracy. However, his scrutiny moved beyond precursory criticisms. Elsewhere he

¹³⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹³⁹ David Walker, *Adimadversions on Relief Publications, Especially...Emitted By...Patrick Hutchison...* (Glasgow: W.Smith, 1780), 50ff, 89.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 28.

¹⁴¹ Hutchison, *Animadversions*, 12.

alleged that the Seceder's controversy over the Burgess Oath demonstrated that their 'principles' 'confound the religion of the Son of God with the civil rights of mankind, and does not preserve the distinction between religion and the state.' Moreover, he judged that the Seceders essentially 'blend[ed] the kingdom of Christ with the kingdoms of this world' and concluded,

When I read the writings and controversies of the Seceders about acts of assemblies and parliaments, and state settlements of religion, on which they build, and to which they pay such a superstitious regard, the only useful instruction I have received from them, is, that they have given me a humbling view of the ignorance and folly of making, and of the baleful influence which carnal and perverted notions of the nature of Messiah's kingdom have upon the minds of men.¹⁴²

Hutchison's position marked a decisive movement away from the high ideal of a National Church, or nation corporately covenanted with God. This would prove to be the lasting criticism against the Secession Synods' rigorous Covenant formulations, and one that would also begin to precipitate internecine strife with the Synods over Voluntarist¹⁴³ views by the 1790s.

However, Hutchison had assumed far too much about the Seceders' view of civil magistracy. Seceder polemicists never argued for any homogeneity of the two kingdoms theory into a form of theocracy. They understood the civil magistracy's role as defender, promoter and maintainer of Presbyterian Protestantism. The Church's role was to be entirely spiritual and supportive of the Hanoverian crown.¹⁴⁴ The Secession's theological statements, documents defending covenanting, and ministers' treatises on magistracy articulate that it was instituted

¹⁴² Hutchison, *Religious System...Of Relief*, 3-4.

¹⁴³ 'Voluntarist' ideas were both direct and indirect movements away from the 'establishment' principle of a national Church. While voluntarist views were maintained by the Relief Church from the middle of the century as theological ideals, these same ideas became fiercely political around 1829. However, this movement began to gain momentum within the Secession Synods by the end of the eighteenth century.

¹⁴⁴ Associate Presbytery, *Answers*, 70ff. Previously, we noted how the Seceders had raised a militia against the 1745 Jacobite rising. The Antiburgher minister of Jedburgh, Alexander Shanks, published a set of sermons entitled *The Peace and Order Recommended to Society* (Edinburgh: Dickson and Fairbairn, 1793) during the French Revolution when the British monarchy feared similar unrest. M'Kerrow, *History*, 922-923, indicated how for his faithful support of George III, Shanks was even offered a pension from the government. Considering it his civil and religious 'duty', Shanks declined the pension.

by God as the moral governor over the world, rather than by Christ as mediator. Magistracy, according to the Seceders, was based on a Christian view of natural law, or ‘the natural and eternal law of God’.¹⁴⁵ The Secession advocated a relationship between Church and State that, while keeping each institution distinct, was viewed as collaborative and mutually beneficial. As such, it was in line with Reformation Scotland’s *Second Book of Discipline* and classic federal theology, but not the eighteenth century’s growing Enlightenment emphases.

Part II.

Covenant Piety’s Demise

In the late seventeenth century, Scotland’s population, widely dispersed geographically, was estimated at just over a million.¹⁴⁶ Scotland ranked among the poorest of European nations at the beginning of the eighteenth century. It was largely rural and still employed ‘primitive’ agricultural methods.¹⁴⁷ Yet from a poor, rural, country in comparison to England or other European powers, Scotland was to experience considerable transformation in the second half of the century. Agricultural improvements, imports in cotton and tobacco from the American colonies, a booming linen textile industry, a formidable banking system, and a redistribution and growth in population recast Scotland into a more urban and industrial nation. Scotland had entered an ‘age of improvement’.¹⁴⁸

Even with considerable emigration from 1755-1820, Scotland’s population had experienced an increase by roughly two-thirds since the 1690s. The 1821 census put the population at 2,091,000.¹⁴⁹ Scotland’s population had moved from being predominately rural and based on subsistence agriculture to one that was more urban and industrialised. Agricultural

¹⁴⁵ Associate Presbytery, *Answers*, 70.

¹⁴⁶ Devine, *Scottish*, xix.

¹⁴⁷ William Ferguson, *Scotland: 1689 to the Present* (Edinburgh: Oliver&Boyd, 1978), 70-71.

¹⁴⁸ T. C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People 1560-1830* (London: Collins, 1970), 241-244, 212-213.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 249, 247-250.

improvements aided in promoting industrial advancement. The traditional economic labour force shifted from farming to industry and commerce. Scotland's progress in industrialisation surpassed most other European nations between 1700 and 1850, turning Scots from the most rural people in Europe into one of the five most urbanised. This was a period of economic advancement which inevitably entailed social advancement.¹⁵⁰ Middle classes expanded as commerce and industry boomed and Scottish cities like Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, Aberdeen, Paisley, Greenock, Falkirk, and Kilmarnock trebled in size.¹⁵¹ With the gradual increase in wealth and social status came newer political expectations that encouraged a greater democratic voice. New optimism for political reform was in the air, largely due to the revolutionary age. The revolutions in France and America enhanced notions of greater democratic liberties and a questioning attitude toward Scotland's aristocracy. Yet, Scotland's experience of economic and social improvements, a stable and tolerant political structure, along with Presbyterianism's fear of the anti-Christian political rule in France, were to keep revolution at bay.¹⁵² Thus, from the 1760s, Secession and Reformed Presbyterians found themselves in a period of substantial transformation. The social historian Callum Brown has argued that by 'the last decade of the eighteenth century, the Seceders' strength started to shift towards urban districts in which artisan and lower middle-class groups came to identify with evangelical dissent'.¹⁵³ This period of social change, doubtlessly was significant in the Secession Synods' growth. It also had a general effect over the continued approbation of their doctrinal *Testimony*. The Reformed Presbyterians grew slowly, but never at the rate of the Seceders.

The Relief Church historian Gavin Struthers emphasized that by 1761 the 'two large and powerful bodies' of the Secession Church, [had] missionaries in America and Ireland, and were gradually spreading themselves into England. They were taking deep root and filling

¹⁵⁰ Devine, *Scottish*, 153-155, 112-113.

¹⁵¹ Smout, *History*, 260ff.

¹⁵² Devine, *Scottish*, 212-220.

¹⁵³ Brown, *Religion and Society*, 24.

the land.’¹⁵⁴ The Church of Scotland’s General Assembly was aware in 1766 that some 100,000 Scots comprised the total ‘dissenting’ population.¹⁵⁵ It is difficult to calculate the Seceders’ actual membership numbers from 1733-1820, and the ‘United Societies’ and Reformed Presbyterians from 1690-1820. The Associate Presbytery’s *Records* show the Secession movement’s rapid increase from the start. Their *Records* indicate that they turned away a number of groups desiring evangelical ministers and ecclesiastical affiliation.¹⁵⁶ MacKelvie’s *Annals and Statistics* provides helpful details of the Seceders’ numerical growth. MacKelvie’s *Annals* of nearly every congregation within the Secession reveals the considerable numerical growth of congregations. After the Burgess Oath controversy had divided the Synod, there were 26 Antiburgher congregations and 19 Burgher congregations. However, from 1747-1756, there were 51 Secession congregations added, 36 Antiburgher and 15 Burgher congregations. MacKelvie qualified that not all of these 51 congregations after the Burgess Oath controversy were new additions; they were divided congregations from the schism. Still, of these 51 congregations, 20 were new to the Secession. From 1757-1766, another 25 Antiburgher and 18 Burgher congregations were added for a total of 139 churches. From 1767-1776, 12 congregations were added to the Antiburgher Synod and 18 to the Burgher Synod for a total of 169 Secession Churches.¹⁵⁷

From 1777-1786 both Secession Synods continued to increase in membership. The Antiburghers established another 15 congregations and the Burghers increased by 21. From 1787-1796 there was an increase of 17 Antiburgher and 29 Burgher congregations. This meant that a total of 251 churches had expressed loyalty to the Secession’s (Bond and Covenants) *Testimony* before the ‘New Light’ revisions would change either Synods’ fervour toward federal theology’s corporate dimensions. However, the period from 1797-1806,

¹⁵⁴ Struthers, *Relief Church*, 169-171.

¹⁵⁵ *Scots Magazine*, vol. XXVII (Edinburgh: 1765), 277. Brown, *Religion and Society*, 20, has noted that ‘Contemporary calculations by those sympathetic to the Established church tended to weight statistics against dissent.’

¹⁵⁶ *Asso. Presbytery Records*.

¹⁵⁷ Mackelvie, *Annals*, 188-181.

which was marked by the 'New Light' controversy, saw a slight decline in both Synods' expansions. The Antiburghers increased by 14 congregations while the Burghers increased by 28 congregations. Yet, from 1807-1816, only 4 Antiburgher congregations and 20 Burgher churches were added. Clearly, the covenanting strictures (and debate which surrounded them) asked too much of those interested in evangelical dissent. The 'United Societies' were considered an undivided body insofar as their ecclesiastical administration and the services of their ministers were concerned. From ca.1690-1743, the 'General Meeting' of the 'United Societies' was the representative governing body for those who chose to remain outside the Revolution Church of Scotland or join with the Seceders. After 1743, and with the formation of the Reformed Presbytery, organizational decisions for these 'Societies' rested in the hands of the new denomination. From 1749-1753, the tiny Reformed Presbytery's growth was stunted by a doctrinal controversy over Christ's atonement.¹⁵⁸ Still, as the Reformed Presbyterian denomination began to grow again, the lack of ministers forced the 'Societies' found throughout central and southwest Scotland into two regional 'congregations' by 1761. The Northern congregation was assigned to John McMillan II (1730-1808), while the Southern congregation was given to John Courtass (d.1795). In each of the regional congregations there were 'flagship' churches. In the Northern region, it was Pentland in Midlothian, as well as at Sandhills east of Glasgow. In the Southern region, it was at Quarrelwood, near Dumfries, and at the Water of Urr near Castle Douglas.¹⁵⁹ Callum Brown has estimated the Reformed Presbytery's numbers at 10,000 in 1743. Generally lower-class peasantry, the Reformed Presbyterians had few middle-class adherents because they resisted paying government taxes.¹⁶⁰ They remained a rural sect widely scattered around central and lowland Scotland. It was not until after 1761, that more ministers were ordained to serve other congregations. In 1753, the Reformed

¹⁵⁸ Hutchison, *R.P.History*, 194-201.

¹⁵⁹ W.J. Couper, *Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland: Congregations, Ministers and Students* (Edinburgh: UFC, 1925), 9-16.

¹⁶⁰ Brown, *Religion and Society*, 28-29. Reformed Presbyterian Church, *Summary*, 35, estimated that the 'United Societies' had 7,000 adherents before 1743.

Presbytery had 7 ministers, one of whom was in America. By the 1780s their ministers had trebled in number and the denomination had a small urban presence.¹⁶¹ Like the Secession Synods, they too were experiencing Scotland's age of improvement.

The eighteenth-century's final decade also witnessed profound intellectual, political, and ecclesiastical changes.¹⁶² One of the Antiburgher's valiant defenders of covenanting piety, John Young, indicated how the changing conditions of the 1790s had affected Scotland's religious atmosphere. In 1794, he noted that 'never were the minds of men so intent upon political subjects, nor so many pens employed in political discussions, as since the year 1789'.¹⁶³ Young primarily was reflecting on the activities within his own ecclesiastical community. These changes, as he noted, were not unconnected with the general intellectual and social transformations associated with the French Revolution.¹⁶⁴ Radical individualism and the rejection of traditional forms of authority, monarchical and ecclesiastical, bolstered opposition to the covenant idea. The 'Enlightenment age' brought a questioning spirit into the Secession Churches' world of what were once perceived as timeless 'Covenant' commitments. An evangelical Presbyterianism, tightly wrapped in federal theology, had stood strong throughout much of the century. But by the 1790s, gone were the stalwarts who had prized and defended Scotland's older federal theology. Absent from Scotland's ecclesiastical conversations were visionaries like the original Seceders and their successors William Moncrieff, Adam Gib, and James Morison, or even the more insular but voluble early Reformed Presbyters in John McMillan and Thomas Nairn. Federal theology's corporate application, once entrenched within Scotland's evangelical soul had now long since passed its zenith. The endless theological and ecclesiastical controversies that surrounded federal theology gradually had produced a lethargy among later generations of

¹⁶¹ Hutchison, *R.P. History*, 198, 439.

¹⁶² S.J. Brown, 'End of the Old Established Church Ideal in Scotland, 1790-1850', in *Scottish Churches and the Union of Parliament 1707-1999*, ed. James Kirk (Edinburgh: SCHS, 2001), 75, ff.

¹⁶³ John Young, *Essays on the Following Interesting Subjects...* (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1794), 1.

¹⁶⁴ Colin Kidd, 'The Kirk, the French Revolution, and the Burden of Scottish Whiggery', in *Religious Change in Europe 1650-1914*, ed. Nigel Aston (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 213-234.

Secession clergy. As the prospects of a Covenant awakening leading to spiritual and ecclesiastical revival diminished, by the 1780-90s the rays of 'New Light'—Enlightenment theology, society, and politics—began to illuminate what seemed to be better ecclesiastical and spiritual paths.

The ethereal hopes of Established Church ministers who believed that the 1690 Revolution Settlement could uphold Scotland's Covenant obligations were lost by the 1733 Secession. So too were the aspirations of the original Seceders and their followers who had anticipated that Scotland's revival would come through the tried and true means of covenanting. Endlessly defending covenanting, rearticulating imprecise views on Church and State, and the rigidity of the Secession Synods' terms of communion seemingly had become nothing more than pedantic irrelevancy for newer generations of Secession clergy. The unreality of corporate Covenant ideals co-existing in an 'Enlightened' century—a national Church and covenanted society functioning uniformly in purpose but distinctively in administrative functions—set the stage for the Secession Synods to alter their connections with the Covenanting past and the strict terms of subscription to their doctrinal standards. Their theological rigidity gradually was supplanted by milder and more 'latitudinarian' theology¹⁶⁵ that slowly wore down federal theology's corporate dimensions through emphases on individual evangelical experience. This was not unlike the doctrinal direction that the Relief Church had chosen.¹⁶⁶ By the 1760s, the Relief Church and remaining evangelicals within the Established Church had already depoliticized their Calvinist theology and embraced broader evangelical emphases that eschewed anything to do with a covenanted Church or State. Among the Established and Relief Churches' evangelicals, revivalist influences prioritized the individual's connection to God, and swept away any nuance of corporate holiness. What remained was a broader, more individualistically focused federal theology

¹⁶⁵ I.P. Hazlett, 'Ebbs and Flows of the Theology in Glasgow', in *Traditions of Theology in Glasgow 1450-1990*, ed. I.P. Hazlett (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic, 1993), 16.

¹⁶⁶ Struthers, *Relief Church*, 305-331.

that had completely disengaged from the theological or political scruples of the past and the Covenanted martyrs. The shift away from the corporate covenanted faith to the broader Calvinistic evangelical faith meant that political loyalties now rested on the individual and not on the Church or on the hope of re-establishing the covenanted past. Buffeted by the currents of Enlightenment thought, federal theology's corporate verities, long embattled in interpretive controversies, were put aside for the more discernable individual, and politically tolerant ones.¹⁶⁷ The once potent hermeneutical and historical parallelisms between biblical Israel and Covenanted Scotland were used with less frequency, and had become questionable foundations for the *Confession's* doctrine of magistracy and Covenant implications.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, with Scotland's growing number of Churches, external conformity to confessional and historic forms of federal Calvinism were now subject to broader interpretation and differing affirmations.¹⁶⁹ This more pluralist religious culture had little place for a theology that upheld the national Church or national Covenants. Scotland's religious landscape had changed from the 1690 ideals and hopeful aspirations of Covenant renewals. Multiple denominations produced a more pluralistic religious sensitivity than in the previous epochs. This weakened the complex ecclesiology of federal theology and the ideal of a Covenanted nation through a national Church. The mid-century revivals lent credibility to the idea that an individual's conversion was more significant than the national Church or societal reform. The effect of evangelical individualism disrupted the integrating power of corporate covenanting in stimulating revival. Ned Landsman appears correct in arguing that the Enlightenment transformed the political language of evangelicals in the second half of the century.¹⁷⁰ Certainly, Church of Scotland evangelicals distanced themselves from classic federal theology's corporate implications. The Seceders also had

¹⁶⁷ Thomas M'Crie, *Statement of the Difference...[1806]*, Second ed. (Edinburgh: C.F.Lyon, 1872), 9-9, 12-13, 16-18.

¹⁶⁸ John Dick, *Confessions of Faith...* (Edinburgh: W.Laing, 1796), 4-6, ff. M'Crie, *Statement*, 120-128, 169, Robert Shirra, *Church and Civil Government Considered...* (Edinburgh: 1794), 6-17-18.

¹⁶⁹ Hutchison, *Animadversions*, 12.

¹⁷⁰ Landsman, 'Presbyterians and Provincial Society: The Evangelical Enlightenment in the West of Scotland, 1740-1775', 219.

distanced themselves from the anti-government rhetoric of the previous century. However, in doing so, they perpetuated confusion amongst themselves over Church and State relations. The covenant idea could never be completely devoid of political implications.

'New Light' Changes in Subscription and Covenant

Thus, the most radical shift away from federal theology's corporate dimensions was more politically rather than theologically induced; although the deterioration of classic federal theology had made such a shift possible. Ministers in both Synods had begun to separate their political perspectives, on which there was no clear consensus,¹⁷¹ from their theology. It is striking that the Secession Synods did not propose theological alternatives to federal theology's corporate application. Rather, they simply succumbed to Enlightenment optimism for a democratic, civil society where the plurality of Presbyterian and other denominations co-existed for the common good of the British state. In 1781, Archibald Bruce of Whitburn (1746-1816), the Antiburgher Synod Professor of Divinity, had observed that many of the Secession's clergymen had already become enamoured with Enlightenment political and 'democratic' leanings.¹⁷² Ministers who staunchly upheld federal theology and the Secession practice of covenanting were not unified in their political affiliations.¹⁷³ Thus, Secession ministers of either Synod might firmly hold to their *Testimonies*, but differ with each other over progressive, democratic political ideals or conservative support of the governing aristocracy. This can be seen in the case the Antiburgher John Young of Hawick, a prolific apologist for Covenant piety. He was brought up on charges by his Synod for what seemed to be democratic, revolutionist language. His writings bear testimony to a growing lack of political unanimity among Secession ministers.¹⁷⁴ His Synod issued no disciplinary

¹⁷¹ Emma Vincent, 'Responses of Scottish Churchmen to the French Revolution, 1789-1802', *Scottish Historical Review* 73 (1994): 207ff.

¹⁷² Archibald Bruce, *Free Thoughts on the Toleration...* (Edinburgh: 1781), 342-343.

¹⁷³ John Brims, 'Covenanting Tradition and Scottish Radicalism in the 1790s', in *Covenant, Charter, and Party: Traditions of Revolt and Protest in Modern Scottish History*, ed. Terry Botherstone (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University, 1989), 52ff.

¹⁷⁴ Young, *Essays*.

action.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, with some ministers favouring a more conservative position on the British constitution and others embracing the newer and more liberal, democratic trends, combined with the recent downfall of France's national religious establishment, a renewed interest in the vexed question of Church and State relations emerged within the Secession Synods.¹⁷⁶ The shift from aristocratic authority to more democratic conceptions of British society's ordering during the revolutionary period pervasively altered evangelicals' political views.¹⁷⁷ This also demonstrates how the gradual weakening of their theology through endless controversies had taken their toll.

The Burgher and Antiburgher Synods internally faced sceptical attitudes toward the *Confession's* definition of the magistracy's role in religious affairs.¹⁷⁸ Assuming the archetypal two kingdoms theology, the *Confession* indicated that a certain amount of compulsion could be enforced from the political realm to promote Protestant piety in the spiritual realm. Chapter XXIII declared that the 'magistrate' 'hath authority, and it is his duty to take order that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, and that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, and all corruptions and abuses in worship or discipline be prevented or reformed'.¹⁷⁹ The National Covenant was not questioned within either Synod. Instead it primarily was the *Confession* and the Solemn League and Covenant's positions on magistracy which had become unsuitable to the British political context of the 1790s.¹⁸⁰ The *Confession* and Solemn League and Covenant both authorised the use of force by a magistrate to uphold and propagate the Protestant religion of the British 'kingdoms' and 'extirpate' what was deemed heterodox. The weakened influence of federal theology enabled many Secession ministers to interpret their

¹⁷⁵ M'Kerrow, *History*, 375-377.

¹⁷⁶ Struthers, *Relief Church*, chapter xxi.

¹⁷⁷ Bruce, *Toleration...* 342-343. Kidd, 'Kirk', 215ff.

¹⁷⁸ Notably sympathetic to the 'New Light' cause, M'Kerrow, *History*, remains the standard secondary source on the subject.

¹⁷⁹ *WCF*, 23.3.

¹⁸⁰ Archibald Bruce, *Brief Statement...Principles of Seceders, Respecting Civil Government...* (Edinburgh: Ogle&Guthrie, 1799).

historic and doctrinal statements apart from their original theological foundations. Without the prospect of a single Scottish national Church in sight, and little hope of an (English) Presbyterian and covenanted monarch, Secession clergymen at least had lost sight of the original Seceders' covenanting theology and aspirations of revival. Such drastic social and political changes roiled what had always been contentious, but what now seemed to be (explicit) inconsistencies, within the Secession Synods' foundational *Testimonies*. From at least the 1743 dispute with Nairn, the Associate Presbytery had attempted to outline a balanced, historic and theological position on Church and State relations. They declared that the magistracy's role ought to be done

without assuming any lordship immediately over men's consciences...Now, if true religion became a part of the civil constitution, it inevitably follows that the Church became a part of the State, which doctrine, as it is absurd in itself, so it lays a plain foundation for Erastianism, overturning the distinction between the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Kingdoms of this world.¹⁸¹

However, the definitions defined in the Nairn controversy no longer could repel the tide of surging criticisms against what seemed to be anachronistic positions on Church and State. Broader evangelical emphases away from the two kingdoms theology seemed more doctrinally balanced for the time. The conception of a spiritual kingdom of Christ, focused solely on individual conversion and duty to God was much more palatable as a conception of the Church. The State's role seemed more suited as a secular, unmingled realm that promoted the good of all British Christian citizens.¹⁸² Thus, a conflict of interest between public profession to the Secession's *Testimonies* and personal political beliefs vitiated the future of the Burgher and Antiburgher Synods in what became known as the 'Auld Licht-New Licht' controversy.¹⁸³

'New Light' discussions first arose in the Antiburgher Synod, although similar debates had been stifled earlier within the Burgher Synod. The Burgher Synod erupted into controversy

¹⁸¹ Associate Presbytery, *Answers*, 71,16.

¹⁸² Struthers, *Relief Church*, 305-331.

¹⁸³ The 'proceedings' of this controversy in both Secession Synods are vast, largely unknown, and undoubtedly warrant a separate study.

when a petition was presented by John Fraser, minister of Auchtermuchty in 1795. Along with several others, he took issue with the ministerial terms of communion, which included swearing the 'Bond and Covenants'. Fraser complained that the Synod's standards of subscription to the Covenants needed some qualification. In order to accept Chapter XXIII of the *Confession*, Fraser also argued that the Synod would have to acknowledge that 'religion was compulsory' and that the State had an obligation to 'enforce' it.¹⁸⁴ By 1797, more than a few Burghers questioned their formula for subscription that dated back to 1744.¹⁸⁵ This included the 'terms of communion' which esteemed the perpetual obligation of the Covenants and the magistracy's duty to promote the religion. Instead of adjusting their theological *Testimonies* by alleviating the Covenants' obligations or reversing its position on magistracy, the Burghers augmented an explanatory statement to their *Testimonies*. Known as the 'Preamble', this statement declared that the Burghers did not require an approval of compulsory measures in religion. In effect, it 'sanctioned a latitude of interpretation' on their historic 'formula of subscription'. Ministers now had the option of suspending judgment on the controversial chapters of the *Confession* and Covenants.¹⁸⁶ In 1799, only eight ministers rejected the 'Preamble'. They left the Burgher Synod, instead adhering to the original *Testimonies*. They constituted themselves into 'The Original or Old Light Burgher Presbytery'.¹⁸⁷ A few years later, it increased to a Synod that held the Covenanting tradition in high esteem but terminally deferred any action on Covenant renewal.

The Antiburgher Synod's debate took a different course, but resulted in a similar outcome as the Burghers. In 1791, the formula for subscription was contested by two Presbyteries to be in need of revision, particularly the question: 'Do you sincerely own and believe the whole

¹⁸⁴ *Proceedings of the Associate Synod Respecting...Proposed Alterations in the Formula...* (Edinburgh: 1796), 1-6.

¹⁸⁵ George Lawson, *Considerations on the Overature...Respecting Some Alterations in the Formula...* (Edinburgh: 1797).

¹⁸⁶ *Address of the Associate Synod...On...The Preamble...*, (Edinburgh: Pillans&Sons, 1799), 17,1-30.

¹⁸⁷ M'Kerrow, *History*, 579,658.

doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith?’ The controversy began when two licentiates had expressed reservations regarding the *Confession’s* position on the magistracy’s power. The Antiburghers’ revision process, described as a ‘‘weighty work’’, lasted eight years ‘upon the review of a document consisting of two-hundred octavo pages’. During this revisionary process, the Secession ‘Bond’ to the Covenants was revised in September 1799. The Synod’s theologian Archibald Bruce and famed historian Thomas M’Crie, among a few others, fiercely resisted the revisions. In 1804, the Synod finalized a *Narrative and Testimony* of their revised ecclesiastical standards. They concluded that ‘The power of the Church is wholly spiritual, and is exercised by her Office-bearers in the whole extent solely with respect to the spiritual interests of men. But the power competent to worldly kingdoms is wholly temporal, respecting only the temporal interests of society.’ Unlike the Burgher Synod, this was a revision from the Secession’s historic *Testimonies* into a broader, updated, evangelical position that eschewed the corporate and embraced the individualistic dimensions of federal theology in the form of personal commitments to the historic ‘Principles’. The revisions pointedly rearticulated Church and State relations.¹⁸⁸ The majority of Antiburghers, once valiant defenders of the Seceders’ old-style federal theology, now embraced the broadened evangelical views emphasizing the pre-eminence of a spiritual kingdom over the two kingdoms theology that had seemingly muddled the roles of Church and State. With the majority of ministers in both Secession Synods and the Relief Church shying away from anything having to do with covenanted conformity in Church and State relations, newer emphases on covenanting being ‘only ecclesiastical in its orientation’ and on the pre-eminence of the ‘spiritual kingdom’ apart from ‘temporal kingdoms’ emerged.¹⁸⁹ These emphases eventually produced what would become Scotland’s Voluntarist movement.¹⁹⁰ The *Narrative and Testimony* also noted how ‘they approve of no other means

¹⁸⁸ *Narrative and Testimony...By the General Associate Synod*, (Edinburgh: Neill&Co., 1804), 193-199.

¹⁸⁹ John Jamieson, *Use of Sacred History...* (Edinburgh: 1802), 358-360.

¹⁹⁰ Brown, ‘End of the Old’, 84ff.

of bringing men into the Church, or retaining them in it, than such as are spiritual, and were used by the apostles and other ministers of the Word in the first ages of the Christian Church—persuasion, not force; the power of the gospel, not the sword of the civil magistrate'.¹⁹¹ Thomas M'Crie's 1804 *Statement* was a worthy attempt at demonstrating the differences in the 'new' theology from the theology 'common to the reformed churches', or what was 'always taught in the public standards of the church of Scotland'. M'Crie's main argument asserted that the 'Secession-body was organised...to maintain and revive' the 'Reformation in Britain' with the ways formally attained...and ratified' by Covenants, and that they had been consistent like other continental Reformed Churches in doing so. Therefore, magistrates and Covenants had their biblical and proper place within the national Church ideal that also tied Church and State together.¹⁹² M'Crie's arguments had no effect.

After the Antiburgher Synod had published their *Narrative and Testimony*, they still advocated a form of Covenant renewal. However, it was obvious that most were keen to move beyond the old ways. Their revisions noted that 'in adhering to the religious reformation engaged to in this Covenant, we utterly disclaim all obligation to use any methods inconsistent with liberty of conscience in prosecuting the ends of it'.¹⁹³ The revised version of Covenant renewal highlighted the personal, ecclesiastical duties as entirely 'religious', and omitted any political implications of the old corporate theological dimensions. A few remaining conservative 'Old Lights' objected to the revisions.¹⁹⁴ By 1806, the Antiburgher Synod further voted to disregard the subscription to Scotland's Covenants and the *Confession's* chapter on the magistrate. They also rearticulated their position on the *Confession* as a whole, declaring its complete subordination to the higher authority of the Bible. The resultant division of the 'Old Light' minority group denominated itself as 'The Constitutional Associate Presbytery'. The Constitutional Associate Presbytery

¹⁹¹ M'Kerrow, *History*, 431-435, 443-444.

¹⁹² M'Crie, *Statement*, 79, 206, 112-113.

¹⁹³ *Narrative and Testimony*, 159-160, Formula-219.

¹⁹⁴ M'Kerrow, *History*, 466.

(Antiburgher) maintained the ways of old because 'The duty and warrantableness of civil rulers employing their authority in an active support of the interests of religion and the Kingdom of Christ, and in promoting reformation, had been denied and set aside'.¹⁹⁵ Their fidelity to the old covenanted way remained strong, but their numbers were small.¹⁹⁶ The 1820 union of the 'New Light' Burgher and Antiburgher Synods into the United Secession Synod effectively marginalized the covenanting purists into small factious, outdated sects. The remaining conservative fringe groups of the 'Old Light Burgher Presbytery' and 'Old Light Antiburgher' Constitutional Associate Presbytery dwindled into obscurity. The Reformed Presbyterians, although relaxing their terms of communion in 1822, attempted to stay their covenanted course. They too would acquiesce to the nineteenth century's sensibilities when their 1863-1876 ecclesiastical union discussions had commenced.¹⁹⁷ The covenant idea held little relevance for early nineteenth-century Scotland's changing ecclesiastical and social contexts. The 'New Light' impulses at the close of the century had opened the way to broader Presbyterian principles and a new toleration for theological diversity in Scottish religion.¹⁹⁸ It also marked the beginning of a gradual 'erosion' from Scottish Presbyterianism's unqualified subscription to confessional Standards.¹⁹⁹

Covenanting: Religious or Political?

While the Covenanting movement of 1638-1650 had undoubtedly been interwoven with political ambitions,²⁰⁰ the eighteenth-century covenanting zealots were motivated

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 442-443.

¹⁹⁶ This is evidenced in Edinburgh's news periodicals of the day. See 'United-Associate Synod', *Caledonian Mercury*, Thursday September 18 1828. 'United-Associate Synod', *Caledonian Mercury*, Saturday, May 13 1837.

¹⁹⁷ Hutchison, *R.P. History*, 266-267, 341ff.

¹⁹⁸ David Fergusson, ed., *Scottish Philosophical Theology, 1700-2000* (Exeter: Academic, 2007), 11, 1-10.

¹⁹⁹ Ian Hamilton, *Erosion of Calvinist Orthodoxy: Seceders and Subscription in Scottish Presbyterianism* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1990), 1-2.

²⁰⁰ Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 29-34.

significantly less by politics.²⁰¹ Colin Kidd has detailed the lingering political dimensions of eighteenth-century covenanting. His study, focusing primarily on the more radical fringe groups zealous for the Covenants, suggests 'that major ideological divisions existed within Scots Presbyterianism which persisted throughout the eighteenth century'. The designation of 'ideological divisions' may be too broad. Significant theological divisions within Presbyterianism are evident. Nevertheless, in terms of a political motivation behind the practice, Kidd rightly pointed out that 'Britishness was not beyond the pale of Covenanting possibility' and 'indeed it was a Covenanting imperative'. Yet, Kidd did not highlight that covenanting was stimulated primarily by a potent evangelical theology. Neither did his study identify covenanting as a practice of piety. Thus, Kidd concluded that covenanting was a 'far from depoliticized' Presbyterian 'identity' 'within the sphere of popular culture'.²⁰² This may have been the perception of the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians' adversaries, but it was not the intended identity. The theological motivations behind covenanting primarily influenced the lofty ideals for a national Church of pure Presbyterian stock. Only in consequence did it demand a covenanted civil government. The Secession Churches, true to their 'Bond' and classic Post-Reformation theology, remained loyal to the Hanoverian monarchy in their goal to re-order Scotland's spiritual landscape. The Reformed Presbyterians, while protesting the uncovenanted Hanoverians by publication and pulpit, avoided political involvement, legal action, taxes and military service.²⁰³

Several popular historiographical assumptions connect covenanting with disloyalty toward the British-State and Hanoverian monarchy. These interpretations, largely stemming from the early twentieth century, seemingly sought to de-legitimize Secession and Reformed Presbyterians because of their lack of ecumenicity. These historians labelled Secession and

²⁰¹ It is not the task of this thesis to outline all the political dimensions associated with Scotland's Covenants. Rather, it is to discern the evangelical impulses behind eighteenth-century Scottish federal theology and its fascination with the covenant idea.

²⁰² Kidd, 'Scots Covenanting Tradition': 1168, 1153-1155, 1161.

²⁰³ Brown, *Religion and Society*, 28.

Reformed Presbyterians as political fanatics bent on preserving a seventeenth-century theocratic ethos, or ‘the shackles of an outworn tyranny’.²⁰⁴ The theological implications of Covenant renewal certainly influenced both the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians’ opinions of the British monarchy and government. However, it is difficult to maintain that extremist politics primarily shaped these evangelical Presbyterians. Some studies have taken the politically volatile excesses of seventeenth-century covenanting and read them into the motivations of eighteenth-century Secession and Reformed Presbyterians.²⁰⁵ Gordon Donaldson called the Seceders ‘politically obsessed’.²⁰⁶ One early twentieth-century study even claimed that the Seceders and Reformed Presbyterians had theonomic political ambitions all along.²⁰⁷ Such generalizations oversimplify both federal theology and its weighty influence on popular piety during the period. They also generalize the Secession and Reformed Presbyterian Churches’ historically differing associations with the seventeenth-century Covenanters. While the scantily detailed discussions of eighteenth-century covenanting have alleged—if not overly-emphasized—its extreme political ramifications, the theological discourses on the subject leave the reader with a different impression. The fierce pamphleteering was theological rather than political. Debates were either internecine or interdenominational. Their writings debated their own principles rather than British politics. This in no way denies that Secession and Reformed Presbyterians remained ambitious for a covenanted society. Their theological beliefs certainly led them to demand a Protestant monarchy that supported Presbyterianism. However, portraying covenanting merely as a practice that attempted to revive political ambitions of a long-vanquished past fails to give due credit to its theological foundations and its intimate

²⁰⁴ Ferguson, *Scotland*, 125. See also James Barr, *The United Free Church of Scotland* (London: Allenson & Company, 1934), 81, and particularly the acerbic essay by Herron, *Kirk by Divine Right*.

²⁰⁵ David Stevenson, *The Covenanters: The National Covenant and Scotland* (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 1988), 75-77, Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 247.

²⁰⁶ Donaldson, *The Faith of the Scots*, 114.

²⁰⁷ Mathieson, *Church and Reform*, 60-62.

portrayal of individual, ecclesiastical and national union with God.²⁰⁸ Eighteenth-century covenanting was stimulated by a profound sense of piety produced from a vibrantly evangelical federal theology and a theological hermeneutic that acknowledged covenantal continuity between the Scottish Church and biblical Israel. These ideas, along with a fervent desire to connect with their covenanting ancestry's spiritual legacy, sustained the practice beyond mere political ambitions. By the mid-eighteenth century, Presbyterians had seen fit to subordinate the political to the theological and ecclesiastical. This in turn created continued schism over how to accomplish the ideal of a covenanted Presbyterian Establishment.

Conclusion

Throughout a divisive late-century period, Presbyterian evangelicals did not fully abandon federal theology. However, they did deliberately move away from its corporate dimensions, the national Church ideal, and the association that Covenant renewal would lead to Scotland's revival. By the early part of the nineteenth century, Scotland's classic formulation of federal theology had run its course. The 'New Light' controversy only furthered underlying convictions that any forceful obligations of religion were unpalatable.

The unfolding drama in preserving Covenant piety illustrates the untidiness and lack of consensus that existed in how federal theology ought to have been applied to a splintered national Church ideal and blossoming 'Enlightened' British State. By the early nineteenth century, whether by *Confession*, Covenant, or State intervention, anything that was contrary to the liberties of individual conscience now came under scrutiny. These ideas had been slowly percolating to the surface before and during the Secession movement's establishment. But the Enlightenment spirit had a powerful effect on evangelical views of Church and State relations. Society had grown fonder of distinguishing the sacred from the secular. Church and State no longer could withstand the same muddled connections as it did in the

²⁰⁸ See chapters 3-4.

seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The Secession movement from the time of the Nairn controversy, the 1743 Covenant renewals, and Burgess Oath controversy, had recognized that the Revolution Settlement was essentially Erastian. This flaw in the Scottish ecclesiastical establishment meant that reform toward a covenanted Church and/or nation could only be upheld in principle by denominations existing outside of the Established Church. This led to a gradual perception that the magistrate ought to attend to secular matters only, rather than religious ones. As the dissenting denominations grew in number, the complexion of Scotland's Church and State relationship changed. Ironically, the Secession and Reformed Presbyterian Churches had created denominational independence out of their obdurate aspirations to uphold Scotland's national Church and Covenant ideals. While the notion of a State Church had been the ideal of the old-style piety, the multiple Secession denominations along with the Relief and Reformed Presbyterian Synods had eroded away the covenanted hope of a national Church functioning in harmony with the State. The 'Established' Church had not lived up to the expectations of those who valued the goals of the past. The Church of Scotland may have inherited the national Church ideal, but the covenanting denominations, long 'associated' or standing in protest 'outside' the Church 'by law established', had truly sought to preserve the 'Reformation' principles of the seventeenth century. The unintended consequences of dissenting churches which themselves had radically committed to a national Church ideal that had re-covenanted to God led many toward a liberalisation of the once conservative position. In their quest to uphold the covenant idea where Church and State harmoniously functioned as in the mythic 'golden age' of the Covenants in their radical preservation of an aged theology, they had undermined their own conservative goals for Scotland's Church. The eighteenth century also proved that the national Church ideal stood on shaky ground without its intricate theological foundations. It showed that while federal theology had corporate implications that demanded Church and State attention, consensus on any one form of how those implications ought to be carried out

was lacking. The constant disputations over the covenant idea had finally wearied the evangelicals who had long remained committed to seeing revival in their Church and society.

CONCLUSION

Throughout much of the eighteenth century, the covenant idea was a pronounced aspect of Scottish religion. With the exception of the Covenants of the New England Puritans,¹ nowhere was the covenanted ideal more conscientiously embraced and embraced for so long as in Scotland. Eighteenth-century evangelicals continued to emphasize a practical federal theology that included individual and corporate applications for piety. They held a vision of biblical Israel's theocratic constitution and an emphasis on a national Covenant as the moral pattern for society and an ecclesiastical symbol of Presbyterian purity. The ideal of a Christian commonwealth rooted in Reformation thought and undergirded by Post-Reformation theology remained attractive to those who believed that God had chosen Scotland for a special covenanted relationship. Scotland's Covenants were symbols of Presbyterian piety for a large proportion of eighteenth-century evangelicals. Nevertheless, while Scotland's federal theology was dominant during the first half of the eighteenth-century, thereafter its corporate emphases on piety within Scottish Presbyterianism and among evangelicals began to wane. From the 1760s Scotland's federal theology, which had once seemed to be timeless, absolute and authoritative, began to unravel, dropping its corporate aspects as it came to reflect the more individualistic, interdenominational and missional priorities of later eighteenth-century trans-Atlantic evangelicalism.

Historians and theologians have generally overlooked the continuing influence of Scotland's covenant idea after the Revolution Settlement. Within Scottish Presbyterianism as a whole, the corporate dimensions of federal theology—undergirding the project of a unified commonwealth in which Church and nation were covenantally related to God—diminished

¹ See for example, David A. Weir, *Early New England: A Covenanted Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), Stout, *New England Soul*, Holifield, *Covenant Sealed*.

only slightly after 1690. Nor did the overall sense of national obligations to the Covenants cease to resonate among evangelicals after the parliamentary union of 1707. Presbyterians may have wearied of the political conflicts of the seventeenth century, but they could abandon neither their doctrine nor the covenantal piety that their ancestors had bequeathed to them. What were Scottish Presbyterians to do with their historic Covenant commitments? Were such commitments to be quietly set aside as vestiges of a theological system that had troubled the nation with violent conflict? Or, was federal theology to be contextualized for a period of increased civil and religious tolerance? Or, were the radical ideals of the Covenanting period to be preserved just as they had been in the seventeenth century? Whichever option that Presbyterian evangelicals chose would substantially affect the stability of the national Church and the future of covenantal piety.

Anxiety over what they perceived as Scotland's spiritual decline motivated many evangelical ministers to apply their federal theology in ways they believed had worked in the past. In the early years after the Revolution, the 'United Societies' were the most vocal proponents of restoring Scotland's covenanted past. Yet, prior to 1733 many Post-Revolution evangelical ministers in the Church of Scotland also believed that the Scottish Church would eventually restore the nation's Covenants to confessional prominence.

The Secession of 1733 revived seventeenth-century federal theology and its emphases on corporate piety. The Seceders sought to (re)Covenant themselves as the true, doctrinally pure Scottish Church, and they hoped that such a Church would bring the nation to embrace the 'covenanted principles' of the past. The founding in 1743 of the Reformed Presbytery, which included most of the remaining 'United Societies', also served to revive a corporate, covenantal piety. However, Reformed Presbyterians remained firmly committed to the politically contentious belief in a covenanted Church and State, and they vocally resisted acknowledging Britain's monarchy until the State had renewed the Covenants.

While their theological literature was devotional and polemical, rather than formal and systematic, when compared with their seventeenth-century predecessors, Secession and Reformed Presbyterians still present us with a comprehensive exposition of federal theology and its applications. Through them, the seventeenth-century's theological ethos survived into the eighteenth century and continued to produce among evangelicals an expectation of national revival. Their erudition and pastoral applications of federal theology's complexities offer insights into evangelical thinking in an age sandwiched between the seventeenth-century Covenanting period and the Scottish Enlightenment. Scottish evangelical piety remained firmly rooted in *Westminster Confession* Calvinism throughout the century. Evangelical Presbyterians prior to 1733 drew upon the *Confession's* federal theology in sermon, catechesis, and theological diatribe. Yet, it was also the interpretations and applications of federal theology that formed the root cause of the hair-splitting debates of the *Marrow* controversy.

The nature of the covenant of grace within early eighteenth-century Scottish theology was at the centre of the *Marrow* controversy. According to the 'Marrowmen', the monopleuric and dipleuric facets of the covenant of grace were vital to the continuance of a gracious, biblical form of federal Calvinism. What appeared to be a growing emphasis upon that covenant's conditionality among many Post-Revolution ministers had troubled the 'Marrowmen', who by and large also emphasized Scotland's Covenants. The stress on conditionality resulted in an excessive concern for preaching the law as preparatory for a believer's acceptance of grace and salvation. In adopting the *Marrow's* view that the covenant of grace was unconditional, the Seceders and Reformed Presbyterians attempted to avoid legalism and at the same time uphold federal theology's corporate dimensions as founded in biblical law. They viewed the covenant of grace as absolute. They emphasized the continuing value of the law as rule of life for the Christian, but also for the Church. Thus, their emphasis on obedience to the law was significant for Christian sanctification. The law remained binding

as a covenant of works for the reprobate. This conception of how federal theology applied the law to Christian and reprobate alike kept the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians in step with the *Confession* and Scottish Presbyterianism's historic aspirations for a covenanted Christian society.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the Secession and Reformed Presbyterian denominations had remained firmly committed to a seventeenth-century federal theology that included the *Marrow*'s doctrinal accents on grace, and their passionate evangelical zeal for conversions. However, both groups would struggle to uphold federal theology's corporate teachings within an increasingly pluralist ecclesiastical setting and in the midst of the rapid secularization of Britain's civil and social order. These corporate teachings included the ideal of a national Church, and fostered their firm belief that God had specially selected the Scots to be his people.

The monopoleuric administration of the covenant of grace and doctrine of election formed the theological intersection where Church membership, national religion and personal salvation met. Members of the visible Church, those baptized and professing the Christian faith, were not all viewed as regenerate or elect within the covenant of grace. Rather, evangelicals maintained that the covenant of grace was the Divine extension of salvation to those of the invisible Church, or elect in Christ. It was also the means through which a nation experienced providential blessings. Scotland's federal theology detailed how the covenant of grace extended both to elect and reprobate members of the visible Church. A distinction of the 'internal' and 'external' dimensions of the covenant of grace was necessitated by their national Church ideal and correlated with the binding obligation of Scotland's Covenants. According to this distinction, all members of the visible Church who professed faith in Christ, along with their baptised children, participated in the covenant of grace's external benefits. These benefits included immediate access to the preaching of the Bible, the administration of the Sacraments, and the social order and harmony achieved through the

administration of Church discipline. Through baptism, children entered into the covenant of grace and came under an obligation to participate in the visible Church. Yet, while baptism and profession of faith might place one *in* covenant with God insofar as establishing a connection with the Church community, they did not necessarily imply that one was *of* the covenant by Divine election. While some members of the visible Church embraced their covenant responsibilities in a heart-felt, spiritual way, others merely accepted those responsibilities through a nominal profession of faith and were only apparently in covenant.

The dipleuric side of the covenant of grace applied to true believers only, who would obey the moral law out of true love and gratitude. Compelled by grace, these true believers were expected to practice covenanting as an act of worship. In this regard, the Seceders and Reformed Presbyterians cannot be understood apart from their federal theology. Neither should their covenanting ceremonies be understood mainly as political events. Eighteenth-century covenanting zealots viewed Scotland's Covenants more as expressions of federal theology than of political theory. Obedience to the law of God was the primary impetus for eighteenth-century covenanting. Covenanting ceremonies tended to precede the Lord's Supper—viewed as the climax of covenantal devotion. Personal and corporate covenanting ceremonies were (re)commitments to covenantal duties in every sense.

Secession and Reformed Presbyterian ministers preserved a Reformation and Post-Reformation association of Scotland with biblical Israel. Both groups maintained that Providence guided Scotland's development and that Scotland had been chosen by God, governed by Covenant, and repeatedly disciplined and restored by God's providential hand. Further, both envisaged themselves as godly remnants, faithful to the obligations of the Covenants and preservers of a pure Presbyterian dogma. Both groups believed that a renewal of Scotland's Covenants was essential for the advancement of national righteousness.

Secession and Reformed Presbyterians regarded the failure to renew the Covenants as a primary cause of Divine displeasure and what they perceived as Scotland's spiritual decline in the eighteenth century. Renewing Scotland's Covenants, they believed, would be the means of restoring the 'Reformation' to a full fruition. Revival was primarily conceived of in spiritual terms but it also included the restoration of the Scottish Church to what was perceived to be a 'golden age' of the past. While ministers may have seen personal and national covenanting as unconditional, there remained a sense that Scotland's prosperity rested on its obedience to the Covenants. Both groups affirmed that Scotland's revival was predicated upon Covenant renewals, rather than by a fresh infusion of Divine grace (such as the Cambuslang and Kilsyth revivals of 1741-42). However, the national Covenant ideal demanded a national obedience that was proving to be unrealisable.

For all their evangelical fervour, the dedication of the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians to the corporate applications of federal theology was untidy. This was particularly so for the Secession Synods. While they defended and attempted to implement federal theology in their ecclesiastical affairs, they expended considerable effort in controversies surrounding the covenant idea. Nearly all of their controversies revolved around federal theology's corporate applications and teachings on the civil magistrate. In the end, their nebulous positions on the relations of Church and State raised more questions than they answered. A lack of clear definition on how Scotland's Covenants benefited Church membership within eighteenth-century British society produced ongoing questions from the time of the 1743-1744 ceremonies onwards. The Reformed Presbyterians were consistent in wanting an ecclesiastical and political arrangement akin to 1638-1650; however, this was becoming a hopeless aspiration by the mid-eighteenth century. The Secession and Reformed Presbyterians held to the ideal that Scotland was a covenanted nation; yet Scotland was also now a part of the British parliamentary state in which the large majority of the population

was Anglican, and Scotland was no longer in a position to renew the Covenants in any legal or constitutional sense.

In all of their controversies surrounding the covenant idea, Burgher, Antiburgher, and Reformed Presbyterians remained committed to the *Confession* as the subordinate standard of faith—subordinate, that is, to Scripture alone. This was typical of the Reformed tradition's view of confessional authority.

Both Secession and Reformed Presbyterian ministers defended the application of the Sinaitic covenant—that is, the covenant between God and the nation of Israel that had been sealed on Mount Sinai—as part of federal theology's corporate aspect. The prominence they gave to the Sinaitic covenant is important on two levels. First, it indicated that for many Presbyterians, at least until the 1770s, the Sinaitic covenant was both a covenant of works and a covenant of grace for Israel and the later Christian Church. Evangelicals after the *Marrow* controversy emphasized Sinai's significance to the national Church ideal and to Scotland's covenanted status with God. Secession and Reformed Presbyterians maintained that the State was ordained by God to uphold the moral law and sustained through Providence similar to Israel. Both rejected the notion that the State existed in an autonomous, self-determinative sphere as some Enlightenment era natural law theories held.²

Secondly, the significance given to the Sinaitic covenant by these evangelicals provides insight into their ecumenical relations. The *Westminster Confession* was not specific about how the Sinaitic covenant operated within federal theology. The *Confession* did describe other areas of federal theology's corporate applications (such as Oaths and Vows, Civil Magistracy, and the Sacraments) which theologically enabled evangelicals to underscore Sinai's importance accordingly. However, there was no clear guidance over the place of the

² For a recent study on the complexities of eighteenth-century natural law theory see, Knud Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996).

Sinaitic covenant and the idea of a chosen nation within the *Confession*. As the consensus about Sinai's significance for the Scottish Church unravelled in the later part of the eighteenth century, both Secession Synods became mired in disputes over the practicability of a national Church and the role of the civil magistrate in religious matters.

Having surveyed the theological foundations upon which eighteenth-century evangelical Presbyterians attempted to maintain a covenantal piety, we also considered the various changes that that piety underwent from 1690 to the 1820s. A broader evangelical theology, that did not fully reject federal theology but played down its corporate aspects, developed during the period. It rejected 'covenanting' as a 'necessity' of holiness, maintaining that a personal 'real-heart religion' could exist outside of federal theology's corporate teachings. An individualistic spirituality suited a civil British society governed by principles of natural law.

Evangelicals outside the Secession and Reformed Presbyterian denominations were insisting on a broader interpretation of the Covenants by the 1760s. These evangelicals now maintained that the biblical covenants had no direct relevance for the eighteenth-century Church. This argument was carried forward by those who advocated a separation of Church and State. Beginning with John Glas in 1720s, and ripening with the Relief theologian Patrick Hutchison by the 1770s, more and more evangelicals began to believe that biblical Israel had foreshadowed the person and work of Christ and that the notion of a covenanted nation was merely theoretical, and politically irrelevant to an enlightened age. Instead of the covenanted nation, the new evangelical theology advanced the idea of a 'spiritual kingdom' devoid of covenantal implications for society. The national Church ideal, corporate Covenant commitments, and the practice of covenanting now seemed to many to be unimportant in promoting the spiritual prerogatives of Christ.

Federal theology's corporate aspects seemed no longer relevant to Scotland in the age of improvement. A more pluralist ecclesiastical culture combined with new democratic ideas led many away from the Established Church; it also eased the Secession Synods' theological stringency. The fragmentation of the Scottish Church was too far advanced to maintain the cause of the Covenants. Federal theology began to be interpreted by evangelicals in increasingly individualistic terms.

The growth of the Secession movement, despite constant internecine disputes, was significant. The Reformed Presbytery also experienced growth after their Covenant renewal(s). Such growth should be attributed to the Secession and Reformed Presbyterians' adherence to a warmly evangelical federal theology and to the perceptions among Scotland's laity that both groups identified with a traditional evangelical Presbyterianism, rooted in Scotland's Covenanting past. Obsession with the covenant idea helps to explain the schismatic tendencies of eighteenth-century Presbyterianism as well as the tensions between the English evangelical George Whitefield and the Associate Presbytery during Whitefield's visit to Scotland in 1742. Divisions over the covenanting legacy also help to explain why the Seceders and Reformed Presbyterians could not unite with the Relief Presbyterians or co-operate much with the evangelicals who remained within the Established Church. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Secession and Reformed Presbyterian commitment to the Covenants was becoming quaint and out of touch with an improving British society. Still, these people possessed a strong faith, and they refused to believe that God had loosened his commitment to the Scottish Church or nation. They believed they had a duty to remain loyal to the Covenants. They sought to preserve a Post-Reformation form of federal theology and they glorified the period from 1638 to 1650 as the hey-day of Presbyterian spirituality. These were revivalists of old who recalled the seventeenth-century Covenanter James Guthrie's insistence 'that the Covenant, the Covenants, will yet be Scotland's reviving'.

As the Burgher and Antiburgher Synods increased in membership in the 1770s-80s (due largely to popular aversion to ecclesiastical patronage in the Church of Scotland), and as their adherents prospered socially within an age of improvement and revolution, Scotland's Covenants appeared increasingly as relics of the past. It was in this context that a large number within both Secession Synods embraced 'New Light' theological interpretations and ecclesiastical 'voluntarism', or the belief that religious adherence should be an entirely 'voluntary' decision of an individual within a free society. The Reformed Presbyterians and several smaller factions of orthodox Seceders, known as 'Old Lights', kept alive the Covenants as icons of their piety into the nineteenth-century. Thus, Scottish 'Old Light' and 'New Light' Presbyterianism from 1820 to 1843 is an area that is in need of further research.

Federal theology's corporate teachings had a profound influence on eighteenth-century Scottish Presbyterianism—especially on the relationship of Divine initiative and human responsibility, the connection between Church and State, and the definition of a people of God. Federal theology ultimately proved to be unsustainable in its fuller seventeenth-century formulations respecting covenanting, and eighteenth-century Britain, and Scottish evangelicals came to realise that Scotland could not be conceived as a revival of ancient Israel. Nevertheless, the covenant idea was highly important for the intellectual and ecclesiastical history of Scotland from 1690 to the 1820s.

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